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Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Oedipus" and "The Critic"

The Old Vic is repertory theatre, space permits us to reproduce only four newspaper reviews of each of their four presentations.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

MAY 21, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Doubleheader

THE "Oedipus" which the Old Vic is presenting at the Century as the final bill of its repertory season needed no savory. That the English company has seen fit to include "The Critic" as a sort of antidote to Sophocles in a theatrical double-header redounds less to its good taste than its proficiency. Both plays are produced and performed with superb theatricalism. There is a vitalization of supposedly desiccated classics which is tremendously exciting to witness. Laurence Olivier, turning from the tragic character of the doomed Theban to the brittle clown of Sheridan's lampoon in the space of an intermission, serves notice that he is as fine and versatile an actor as one may look for in any theatrical capital. For all of that, there is an aura of a stunt about this twin bill which ill-becomes its general magnificence.

* * *

No audience could possibly have felt cheated in leaving the theater after the less than conventional length offering of "Oedipus." Here, in the William Butler Yeats translation of the Greek tragedy, the Old Vic surges with all the power and precision of a great permanent company. Aside from the choruses, which are a bit reminiscent of girl school productions of antique masterpieces, the drama unfolds with soaring imagination and artistry. Played with no intermission and no scene change, the work takes on all the nobility of interpretation which enduring fragments of stage communication deserve. The fate of Oedipus, most miserable of men, who experienced the ultimate tragedy of desecrating human experience unwittingly, is conveyed in indelible terms at the Century.

Sophocles might be considered a bit esoteric for Broadway, but Olivier and his fellow-workers rarely let the play sag down in mannered ritual. There is the foreordained unity of structure in the production, the deep philosophical probing and the meticulous variety of character that any one might gain from a reading of "Oedipus." In addition there is an emotional intensity which leaves one breathless and a bit awed after the final curtain of the offering. Olivier is the wheel horse of this bit of alchemy, playing the title role with a force and restraint that is downright wonderful. Ralph Richardson, as Tiresias; Ena Burrill, as Jocasta, the widowed mother who became the mother of her son's progeny, is excellent, and so are the others. Michel Saint-Denis has staged the work wisely, and the costumes and settings are fine.

* * *

"The Critic" finds Olivier without the bleeding eyes which signal his self-imposed blindness when Oedipus discovers himself a patricide and an incestuous son. It finds him quite as crafty in holding one's attention. His performance of the foppish critic-playwright who takes some pals to see his incredible tragedy rehearsed is as wittily forlorn as Richard Brinsley Sheridan meant it to be. All that can be connoted by the word burlesque is instinct in this revival, from the absurd situations to the random bits of business which the company has supplied on its own account. Margaret Leighton and the sometimes rougish Joyce Redman are superb and Miles Malleson, in staging and acting and George Relph deserve several rounds of applause. "The Critic" is elegant lampooning of theater, from those who make it to those who like to be seen attending it. It still seems unfortunate that it and "Oedipus" might not have been shown on separate evenings.

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'OEDIPUS.'

Tragedy by Sophocles; English version by W. B. Yeats; staged by Michel Saint-Denis; music by Anthony Hopkins; scenery by John Piper; costumes by Marie-Helene Daste; lighting by John Sullivan; played by the Old Vic Theater Company; presented by Theater Incorporated, at the Century Theater, Monday evening, May 20, 1946. The cast:

Oedipus	Laurence Olivier
A Priest	Cecil Winter
Creon	Harry Andrews
Tiresias	Ralph Richardson
Boy	Rodolph Cavell
Jocasta	Ena Burrill
Attendants to Jocasta	Joyce Redman Margaret Leighton Nicolette Bernard
First Messenger	Miles Malleson
Herdsman	George Relph
Second Messenger	Michael Warre
Antigone	Jane Wenham
Ismene	Dee Sparks
Chorus Leader	Nicholas Hannen

'THE CRITIC.'

Comedy by Richard Brinsley Sheridan; staged by Miles Malleson; scenery and costumes by Tanya Moiseiwitsch; lighting by John Sullivan; played by the Old Vic Theater Company.

Mr. Dangle	George Relph
Mrs. Dangle	Margaret Leighton
Servant	Robin Lloyd
Mr. Sneer	Peter Copley
Sir Fretful Plagiary	Miles Malleson
Mr. Puff	Laurence Olivier
First Scene Shifter	William Squire
Under Prompter	John Garley
First Sentinel	Frank Duncan
Second Sentinel	George Cooper
Sir Christopher Hatton	George Rose
Sir Walter Raleigh	Michael Warre
Earl of Leicester	Michael Raghan
Governor of Tilbury	Nicholas Hannen
Master of the Horse	Kenneth Edwards
Tilburitia	Nicolette Bernard
Confidant	Joyce Redman
Whiskerandos	Sydney Tafler
Second Scene Shifter	Max Brent
Beefeater	William Mook
Lord Burleigh	Ralph Richardson
First Niece	Diana Maddox
Second Niece	Jane Wenham
Thames	Kenneth Edwards
First Bank	Robin Lloyd
Second Bank	Joseph James
Neptune	George Cooper

The Sun

MAY 21, 1946

Old Vic Company Presents 'Oedipus' and 'The Critic' in Twin Bill.

The Old Vic Theater Company last evening added "Oedipus" by Sophocles and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's "The Critic" to the repertory of their New York engagement at the Century Theater under the banner of Theater Incorporated, and thereby lent new luster to the rapidly waning theatrical season.

To twin these plays in a single bill is to force a group of players to make the leap from high Greek tragedy to eighteenth-century high jinks in the course of one performance, but as was to be expected, the Old Vic actors negotiated the gap nimbly and with great skill. It is on the moving drama of Sophocles that the night's fate hangs, however, and in their presentation of the English version by W. B. Yeats the London company met the test most successfully. In their hands the grim story of the ill-starred King of ancient Thebes became living and intensely exciting theater. Not since the Abbey Players offered it in 1933 has the local stage seen this version "Oedipus." If all productions could be on the same level as that of the Old Vic group it would surely find a public clamoring for it more often.

The top acting laurels of the twin bill were easily carried off last night by Lawrence Olivier. As Oedipus in the opening drama of the evening he gave a performance that ranked with the season's best, building up the character steadily and with increasing power as the play moved relentlessly toward its tragic climax. After Oedipus, his gay and light touch as the famous Mr. Puff of the Sheridan comedy came close to being amazing. At the final curtain last night, the audience was cheering him wildly, and rightly so.

These two plays keep Ralph Richardson but briefly on the stage, but his stay last night was at least long enough to stamp him afresh as the fine actor he is. As Tiresias, the blind seer, in the Sophocles work he gave early tension to the drama in his prophecy of Oedipus's doom and his momentary appearance as the wordless Lord Burleigh in "The Critic" contributed one of the most amusing moments to the Sheridan play.

"Oedipus" offers only one prominent acting role to the Old Vic's feminine contingent, and in it, Ena Burrill brought both a regal touch and emotion to her playing of Jocasta, the queen. Harry Andrews gave just the right austere dignity to the part of Creon, and Nicholas Hannen made an effective leader of the Greek chorus.

The chorus, in "Oedipus," is always a stiff hurdle on the modern stage. At the start, to us at least, its entrance, chanting in unison, broke the spell of the play, but as "Oedipus" progressed, the members of the chorus blended well into the background and added to the play's strength.

Following "Oedipus," Sheridan's satire of the theater of 1779 seems the lightest froth, and the Old Vic players turn it into a jolly romp, pointing up neatly what is still apt today and using it as a vehicle for top notch horse play when Mr. Puff's tragedy gets its burlesqued rehearsal.

In this part of the evening Miles Malleson was a delight as the pompous Sir Fretful Plagiary, as was George Ralph as the stage-dazzled Mr. Dangle. In the rehearsal scenes Michael Reghan and Joyce Redman heightened the laughs by their comic antics.

With last night's bill the Old Vic company completed its premieres for this visit, and that's the only regretful note the first nighters faced today.

HERRICK BROWN.

DAILY NEWS

MAY 21, 1946

Old Vic's 'Oedipus' and 'The Critic' A Rewarding Theatrical Evening

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The fourth and completing bill of the Old Vic repertory at the Century—Sophocles' "Oedipus" and Sheridan's "The Critic"—is admirable. It is admirable in intent, presenting in one evening one of the great tragedies and, as an afterpiece, a comedy whose wit is as enduring as the English-speaking stage itself. The program is equally admirable in performance and is the most rewarding evening of playgoing the Old Vic company has offered.

The Sophocles drama is a heroic affair demanding heroic performances—and these, I think, it has been given. As Oedipus, Laurence Olivier is magnificent. He has and conveys the sense of epic tragedy, and his last moments as the king who has torn his own eyes from their sockets will remain in my memory for a long, long time. There will remain, too, the memory of Ena Burrill as Jocasta, the Queen—a stately, yet pitiful, figure.

For the greater part, the company is up to Sophocles, up to W. B. Yeats' stirring English version, and up to the principal players. Ralph Richardson's brief appearance as Tiresias, the prophet of doom, is a stirring one; Anthony Hopkins' music is markedly helpful and the Chorus of Elders is theatrically effective—although I was not too happy with Nicholas Hannen's performance as the leader of the chorus.

Too Much Makeup.

Having now seen all the plays our visitors are offering, I'd like to observe that the idea of performing repertory leads some of the players into useless extravagances of costume and makeup. George Relph, one of the most stalwart actors of the group, appears as the Herdsman in "Oedipus" and he is so bearded and bedecked with old sheepskins that he looks like Bert Lahr playing the lion in "The Wizard of Oz."

Sheridan's "The Critic" is as wise to show business as tomorrow's drama page or next week's tradesheet. Wiser. It deflates the conceit of everybody connected with the stage. It hands the audience many laughs about critics—and then quite deftly deflates the audience. Its comments on playwrights cannot be bettered, although many a midnight funnyman has overstrained himself trying for neater, sharper epigrams.

And, as the company romps with abandon through the performance, it is a definite and utterly delightful example of dreadful acting. The play within the play is just bad enough to mirror all the sins of Actors' Equity and British Equity combined.

Olivier Scores Again.

Mr. Olivier, the soul-stirring Oedipus of so few moments ago, is now the foppish Puff, a journalistic scoundrel who fancies himself a dramatist. His touch is as adroit and light now as it was dramatic in the first play. Miles Malleson is immensely funny as Sir Fretful Plagiary and Mr. Relph entirely right as Mr. Dangle.

In the play within the play, Mr. Hannen, Joyce Redman, George Rose, Michael Warre, Sydney Tafler and many others are good and lousy—but I mean good. If variety is what you want from a repertory company, you've got it in "The Critic" and "Oedipus."

Journal American

MAY 21, 1946

'Oedipus' and 'Critic' At Century Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

This "Oedipus," with Laurence Olivier as the greatly troubled King, must be the real reason why the Old Vic Theatre Co. threw a few plays in a bag before departing for these United States. Now, after doing well enough by Shakespeare's "Henry IV: Parts I and II," after not doing well enough by Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya," the visiting Londoners are doing more than well enough by Sophocles' mighty tragedy.

Using the W. B. Yeats translation, which, as far as I know, is the most actable in English, the Old Victorians manage almost, if not quite, to live up to their advance publicity. This takes doing! But, under the direction of Michel Saint-Denis, with music by Anthony Hopkins, costumes by Marie-Helene Daste, scenery by John Piper and lighting by John Sullivan, "Oedipus" is vividly alive.

• • •

Here is no Hollywood Hotspur out of "Henry IV: Part I." Here is no blown-up Shallow out of "Henry IV: Part II." Here is no down-stage doctor out of "Uncle Vanya." Here, instead, is a taut, terrified ruler over Thebes, caught in the fateful mills of his ancient gods. Here is a man among men, afraid not only of himself but of his shadows that stretch behind him, and before.

From the opening of the tragedy, which precedes Sheridan's "The Critic" at the Century, Laurence Olivier makes Oedipus his own. More than any Sophoclesian interpreter I have seen, he knows—or gives the impression that he knows—what the shouting's for. His royal raver is a man beside himself. Caught in the clutch of circumstance, his eyes are bloody, his soul unbowed.

• • •

In the surrounding cast, as in all the surrounding casts brought over by the Old Victorians, the females are less admirable than the males. While, in "Oedipus," Harry Andrews as Creon and Ralph Richardson as Tiresias, Cecil Winter as a Priest and George Relph as a Herdsman, are good and helpful to the tragedy, Ena Burrill as Jocasta and Jane Wenham as Antigone, let it down.

As staged by Mr. Saint-Denis up near Central Park, "Oedipus" is augmented by a chorus of Theban elders under the leadership of Nicholas Hannen, which is not always helpful to its movement and its clarity. But, against Mr. Piper's literal background, in Miss Daste's literal costumes, it is Laurence Olivier who convincingly reminds you of the greatness of the play.

"Oedipus" is Sophocles, but Oedipus is Mr. Olivier.

The greater part of last night's congregation at the Century was, I imagine, in the presence of "The Critic" for the first time. I was, at any rate. While not as venerable as its companion-piece, the "Oedipus" Sophocles wrote about 450 B. C., this Sheridan slapstick dates back to 1779 A. D. While not as great a comedy as its predecessor is a tragedy, it has bite and banter.

If "The Critic" proves anything—and I'm pretty sure it tries to—it proves that the showshop is practically indestructible. If, still up near Central Park, Richard Brinsley Sheridan is to be taken at his word, there is small difference between the London theatre of 1779 and the New York theatre of 1946. Plays, playwrights, players and playgoers have not changed in 167 years.

• • •

Without half trying, you or I—or, I bet you, Laurence Olivier—could change the 18th Century Londoners who are Mr. and Mrs. Dangle, Mr. Sneer, Sir Fretful Plagiary and Mr. Puff into their 20th Century Manhattan counterparts. As for the First and Second Scene Shifters, you or I—if not Mr. Olivier—could repeat to you the number of their local. As for that leading lady, Tilburina—

Well, comparisons are odious and the showshoppers of an earlier day and foreign clime are funny after their own fashion. The trouble with them in the Old Victorians' revival is that they fail to get funnier as they go along. Invention begins to thin before "The Critic" is half way over. By the time it is completed, even jokes about the journalists are flat and profitless.

In the Sheridan afterpiece to its Sophocles forerunner, Laurence Olivier returns as the 18th Century yes-man known as Mr. Puff. With the blood out of his eyes and the terror out of his soul, Oedipus comes back in silks and satins, writing plays with one hand and pieces for the papers with the other, keeping his eyes on the main chance all the while. He, too, has his current local counterpart.

George Relph is good as Mr. Dangle, as are Peter Copley as Mr. Sneer, Miles Malleson as Sir Fretful Plagiary and Ralph Richardson as Lord Burleigh. Again, however, the females are less admirable. Except, perhaps, Joyce Redman—she of Doll Tearsheet in "Henry IV: Part II"—in a clownish bit with Nicolette Bernard as Tilburina. Scenery and costumes are gaily in keeping . . .

But "The Critic" runs down, while "Oedipus" doesn't.

"Annie Get Your Gun"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

MAY 17, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

"Bull's Eye"

ALL that is to be wished for in a musical comedy is to be found at the Imperial. "Annie Get Your Gun" has been delayed on its way to town, but the postponement was clearly not a matter of material or performing. The new Rodgers-Hammerstein production has every hallmark of distinction. The Herbert and Dorothy Fields libretto is both lively and funny. The Irving Berlin songs form a fascinating web of wit and melody for the action. Jo Mielziner has decorated a period piece with superb taste, and Lucinda Ballard has dressed it to the teeth. Meanwhile, the one and only Ethel Merman struts through the proceedings with such exuberant enchantment that the show would have been memorable even without its meticulous and impressive panoply.

• • •

Books are generally stumbling blocks for musicals, but not in the case of "Annie Get Your Gun." The tale of the Ohio hillbilly who could outshoot the best marksmen in Buffalo Bill's wild west carnival and became the toast of the old world as well as the new is not particularly startling. The authors have cozied it into a bittersweet first act curtain and then let it coast into a conventional happy ending. The point is that it affords a wide and fluent variety of situations for the happy capers at the Imperial. Comparisons with "Oklahoma!" are neither necessary nor in any sense invidious. "Annie Get Your Gun" is all of a piece, as fresh as a daisy and a delight that is certain to become a hardy Broadway perennial.

• • •

Miss Merman's wonderful shenanigans are quite likely to make one overlook the fact that she has a springboard of no mean dimensions. When Annie Oakley is potshotting with Frank Butler, becoming adopted by Chief Sitting Bull and his Sioux warriors, or giving the horse laugh to debutantes of yesteryear there is such comic magic in the show that it does not need musical comedy ornamentation. The prodigal thing about the offering is that it has a sustained accompaniment of lilting song and nimble dancing. The star has such numbers as "Moonshine Lullaby," "Show Business," "Lost in His Arms" and "They Say It's Wonderful," to send one humming out of the theater. There are half a dozen other musical interludes to be cherished.

• • •

Helen Tamiris has designed the choreography with good sense and imagination. The ballet of the adoption scene is a honey and so is the "Sun in the Morning" number, danced by Roudenko, Nagrin and a brilliantly trained ensemble. Betty Anne Nyman and Kenny Bowers tap out several entrancing rhythms. Meanwhile there is Ray Middleton, making a singularly engaging figure out of Frank Butler and playing up to Miss Merman superbly. And Harry Bellaver, Marty May and the other straight players are just about perfect. Joshua Logan has directed the show as a consummate musical comedy deserved to be staged. "Annie Get Your Gun" may be having a belated premiere, but it is none the less welcome.

'ANNIE GET YOUR GUN.'

Musical play, with music and lyrics by Irving Berlin; book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields; directed by Joshua Logan; sets and lighting by Jo Mielziner; dances by Helen Tamiris; costumes by Lucinda Ballard; orchestra directed by Jay S. Blackton; presented by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d at the Imperial Theater Thursday evening, May 16, 1946. The cast:

Little Boy	Clifford Sales
Little Girl	Mary Ellen Glass
Charlie Davenport	Marty May
Iron Tail	Daniel Nagrin
Yellow Foot	Walter John
Mac (property man)	Cliff Dunstan
Cowboys	Rob Taylor, Bernard Griffin and Jack Pierce
Cowgirls	Mary Brey and Franca Baldwin
Foster Wilson	Art Barnett
Cecile	Beau Tilden
Dolly Tate	Lea Penman
Winnie Tate	Betty Anne Nyman
Tommy Keeler	Kenny Bowers
Frank Butler	Ray Middleton
Girl with bouquet	Katrina Van Oss
Annie Oakley	Ethel Merman
Minnie (Annie's sister)	Nancy Jean Raab
Jessie (another sister)	Camilla De Witt
Nellie (another sister)	Marlene Cameron
Little Jake (her brother)	Clifford Sales
Harry	Don Liberto
Mary	Ellen Hanley
Col. Wm. F. Cody (Buffalo Bill)	William O'Neal
Mrs. Little Horse	Alma Ross
Mrs. Black Tooth	Elizabeth Malone
Mrs. Yellow Foot	Nellie Ranson
Trainman	John Garth 3d
Waiter	Leon Bibb
Riding Mistress	Lubov Roudenko
Porter	Clyde Turner
Major Gordon Lillie (Pawnee Bill)	George Lipton
Chief Sitting Bull	Harry Bellaver
Mabel	Mary Woodley
Louise	Ostrid Lind
Nancy	Dorothy Richards
Andy Turner	Earl Sauvain
Clyde Smith	Victor Clarke
John	Rob Taylor
Freddie	Robert Dixon
Wild Horse	Daniel Nagrin
Pawnee's Messenger	Walter John
Major Domo	John Garth 3d
First Waiter	Clyde Turner
Second Waiter	Leon Bibb
Mr. Schuyler Adams	Don Liberto
Mrs. Schuyler Adams	Dorothy Richards
Dr. Percy Ferguson	Bernard Griffin
Mrs. Percy Ferguson	Marietta Vore
Debutante	Ruth Vrana
Mr. Ernest Henderson	Art Barnett
Mrs. Ernest Henderson	Truly Barbara
Sylvia Potter-Porter	Marjorie Crossland
Mr. Clay	Rob Taylor
Mr. Lockwood	Fred Rivett
Girl in Pink	Christina Lind
Girl in White	Mary Grey

DAILY NEWS

MAY 17, 1946

Merman Scores Bull's-eye With Every Berlin Number in "Annie"

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Ethel Merman is quite a one, and I predict a great future for her. As Annie Oakley in "Annie Get Your Gun" she wins all sharpshooting matches—and as Ethel Merman she wins out over a big show. In competition with some good lyrics and tunes by Irving Berlin, with a lot of Jo Mielziner's best scenery and with the razzle-dazzle atmosphere of a big-time show, she is the champ.

Ever since "Girl Crazy" it has been known that Miss Merman can wrap up a song and put it away—and it has been a long time since "Girl Crazy." It has also been known that she can wear smart clothes with a air that makes them look smarter. Now, in "Annie Get Your Gun," she is looking to the future. She is a better comedienne than she ever was before, with some of the earthy humor of Fanny Brice, and that is why I predict a great future for her. Singers can't last forever, but comediennes can.

There is no immediate reason for worrying about her singing, either. Miss Merman can wrap 'em up and put 'em away with the zing, the punch and the instinct for showmanship she first revealed when she came out upon the Alvin stage and hurled "I Got Rhythm" at all us delighted dicoverers.

Plenty of Songs.

Mr. Berlin has provided a full kit of numbers for her in "Annie"—ballads, rhythms and comedy stuff—and little sure-shot Ethel makes a bull's eye every time. "Doin' What Comes Naturally" is a pleasant novelty, "You Can't Get a Man With a Gun" is genuinely funny, "Sun in the Morning" has a rousing quality, and so on. And in "I'm an Indian" Miss Merman reminds one of that notable musico-medienne, Miss Brice—who once sang a song about "Whoops, I'm an Indian squaw."

I think "Annie Get Your Gun" suffers, though no deliberate intent upon the part of anybody, from too much advance publicity. It had had plenty by the time it was due to open at the Imperial three weeks or so ago, and when a structural defect on the stage forced its postponement until last night it got even more notice.

"Annie" is a good, standard, lavish, big musical and I'm sure it will be a huge success—but it isn't the greatest show in the world. It has some slow spots when Miss Merman and Ray Middleton aren't around singing. Its solo dancers—except one—are not extraordinary, but an Indian ceremonial dance staged by Helen Tamiris and costumed by Lucinda Ballard is splendid.

Wild West Stuff.

Herbert and Dorothy Fields have written the story of "Annie," and it is about Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and its rivalry with another horse circus, Pawnee Bill's. It is also the story of Annie Oakley and her rivalry at marksmanship with a character named Frank Parker (Mr. Middleton), with whom she falls in love, Mr. Middleton, a big, handsome fellow with a big, handsome voice, is an admirable partner for Miss Merman.

Mr. Berlin's music is, as noted, okay. His lyrics are delightfully agile, and I remember one line about "very notable, cut-your-throatable Indians." Mr. Mielziner and Miss Ballard have made the show an eyeful, and Joshua Logan has directed it smartly and with humor.

An amiable company includes Marty May as a showman, Art Barnett as a hotel proprietor, Lea Penman as a dragon, Betty Anne Nyman as a cute blonde with a turned-up nose, William O'Neal as Buffalo Bill, George Lipton as Pawnee Bill and Harry Bellaver as an amusing Indian chief who can't grow anything on his land because of too much oil on it. Daniel Nagrin's dancing in the Indian ceremonial is very good.

The Sun

MAY 17, 1946

'Annie Get Your Gun' Hit at the Imperial, Merman Overcomes Flimsy Book.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"Annie Get Your Gun" went into business last night at the Imperial, bringing along sure-shot Annie Oakley, the legendary Buffalo Bill, a big and handsome production, and the songs of Irving Berlin. All of which will keep this new show in 45th street for many a month. Those specialists in hits, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d, make the presentation.

The big news about "Annie Get Your Gun" is that it reveals Ethel Merman in her best form since "Anything Goes," and that wasn't just the other afternoon. Miss Merman, now wearing buckskin as the redoubtable sharpshooter from the Kentucky hills, is her own hearty, brassy, noisy self. She shouts the Berlin music with good effect. She often comes stridently to the aid of a sagging book. She has a great time all evening.

Irving Berlin's score is not a notable one, but his tunes are singable and pleasant and his lyrics are particularly good. He has contributed comedy numbers as well as sentimental ballads and such songs as "Sun in the Morning," "The Girl I Marry," "Show Business" and "You Can't Get a Man With a Gun" do a lot for the show. Ray Middleton, playing the competitive crackshot, Frank Butler, with whom the gawky Annie falls instantly in love, is excellent vocally and goes along with Miss Merman in giving valiant service to the composer and to the show.

The book? It's on the flimsy side, definitely. And rather witless, too. Herbert and Dorothy Fields start well enough with their libretto, only to have it run down badly in the second half. But in the case of "Annie Get Your Gun" a listless story won't matter a great deal. Somehow, in shows as big as this, such a fault is sometimes blithely overlooked.

"Annie," going back to its assets, offers good dancing, good singing, some excellent Lucinda Ballard costumes and it has that professional air all over. Joshua Logan has directed, Tamaris did the dances and Jo Mielziner the settings. These people are among the leaders in their fields and such are the kind of people the producers insisted on having around.

The company is good enough. Betty Anne Nyman and Kenny Bowers are pleasant and sprightly dancers. Marty May is bland and engaging as the manager of the Wild West show and William O'Neal is a towering and impressive figure as William F. Cody himself. Harry Ballaver grunts convincingly as Chief Sitting Bull.

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, gradually taking over quite a chunk of the mid-Forties with their shows, have another hit in "Annie Get Your Gun." It will be playing at the Imperial until the exuberant Miss Merman gets tired of lifting her squirrel rifle to her shoulder.

New York Post

MAY 17, 1946

Everything Just Right In 'Annie Get Your Gun'

By Vernon Rice

Seldom is seen in the theatre an offering in which everything is just as it should be, but such a show arrived last night when "Annie Get Your Gun," starring Ethel Merman, made its belated appearance at the Imperial.

Irving Berlin, who has never been a slouch when it comes to writing scores, has outdone himself this time. No use trying to pick a hit tune, for all the tunes are hits. One is just as hummable and singable as the next.

Ethel Merman is at her lusty, free and easy best. Some time ago Miss Merman jumped from a singing star to a singing comedy star, but last evening she came through as the supreme artist in the musical comedy field. No longer is she just Ethel Merman cutting capers upon the stage. She is now able to develop a consistent characterization and stay with it to the show's end.

And when she opens her mouth to sing, she sings! Nice, loud, clear tones with not a word of the lyrics kept a secret for just her and those on stage to share.

As if this weren't enough, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d, who produced the musical, continued merrily on their way, stuffing the production to overflowing with eye-filling and ear-filling goodness. Jo Mielziner's sets were colorful and opulent, Lucinda Ballard's costumes were as bright as morning's sun in spring, Helen Tamiris' choreography was breathtaking, and Joshua Logan directed the whole thing with the idea that a show moves some place besides out of the theatre at the end of its first week.

There's a Book

Herbert and Dorothy Fields, who have provided many a book for many a musical, some good, some not, have written the book of their combined careers in "Annie Get Your Gun." It never hinders the progress of the show, it never falters, it never takes itself seriously.

On the surface it seems to be nothing more than a framework on which Irving Berlin can hang his songs and lyrics, but it has substance and it moves from gag to gag with ease and speed, with the gags never planted just for their own sakes, but with each one growing out of the characters and situations.

Nothing is more deadly than a synopsis of a musical comedy plot, no matter how gay and sprightly the plot appears when viewed upon a stage. Consequently, it will be recorded here as briefly as possible, simply for the record's sake.

Annie Oakley is the gun-totingest, gun-shootingest gal that ever came out of them thar hills. She's picked up by Buffalo Bill for his show, she's that good, and, of course, she falls in love with the star of the show, one Frank Butler, the gun-totingest, gun-shootingest man, who didn't come out of them thar hills.

So anxious is she to impress him that she works up an act in which she shoots out lights lying on her back on a moving motorcycle. Frank is so impressed that he walks out of the show into the rival one of Pawnee Bill. One doesn't pull things like that on a star.

Annie goes to Europe with Buffalo Bill and languishes for love, while Frank stays at home with Pawnee Bill and does the same thing.

They finally get together when Annie takes the words right out of Irving Berlin's lyrics, realizing, "You Can't Get a Man With a Gun."

There is some stuff about both shows having to close unless the Bills, Buffalo and Pawnee, stop being rivals and unite, and there is a sub-plot having to do with a cowboy, Tommy Keeler, and his love for a Winnie Tate.

Ray Middleton returns after a siege with the Army Air Force, Moss Hart's "Winged Victory" and Hollywood to play and sing Frank Butler. It is good to have Mr. Middleton back in the theatre where he belongs, applying that fine baritone voice to Irving Berlin's songs. He is an excellent match for Merman, and alone and together they make superior music.

Kenny Bowers and Betty Anne Nyman are young and fresh as the young loves, Tommy and Winnie, and they can dance and sing engagingly.

And there are such capable performers as Marty May, Lea Penman, Harry Bellaver, William O'Neal and George Lipton, as well as the ballerina Lubov Roudenko, among the large cast, doing their respective chores in a manner one has become accustomed to seeing these people perform.

"Annie Get Your Gun" on every count is an excellent musical comedy, and the way shows run these days, it will probably run for a lifetime.

PM

MAY 19, 1946

—*Kronenberger*

Miss Ethel As Miss Annie

PM Reviews

Its original opening postponed, its advance publicity tremendous, *Annie Get Your Gun* finally came to the Imperial Thursday night. The news about it is cheerful, but very far from overpowering. It's a big Broadway show, in all ways professional, in many ways routine. But it has, for which its producers and patrons can alike be intensely grateful, Ethel Merman.

Miss Merman is in fine form. She is in fine form as a contralto, giving to ditty after Irving Berlin ditty her celebrated sand-blast treatment. She is in fine form as a comedienne, pining (mouth ajar and eyes a-goggle) with amorousness; making her body talk and her stride talk back; raising an oak of a laugh out of an acorn of a joke. She is in fine form as a personality—tough, rowdy, gusty, outstaring and outsnooting anybody who gets in her way. Moreover, as Annie Oakley—the blazing sharpshooter of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, whose aim never faltered till love made it fail—she is very happily cast.

* * *

For me, *Annie* is mainly Miss Merman's show, though the rest of it is competent enough of its kind. It knows its formula, and sticks to it like a well-raised baby. If the show hasn't a trace of style, at least it hasn't a trace of artiness. It has size, a primary-colors picturesqueness, the kind of organized activity that can pass for pep. Mr. Mielziner has done pleasant sets, and Miss Ballard bright costumes. Miss Tamiris' dances are of the lively, likeable pre-de Mille days, before Broadway tried for something better and generally came up with something worse. Herbert and Dorothy Fields' book spins a yarn that has Annie in love with a male sharpshooter she can lick: some of it is lively and perhaps more of it is not.

Irving Berlin's score is musically not exciting—of the real songs, only one or two are tuneful. But Mr. Berlin has contrived a number of pleasant ditties and has laced them with lyrics that, if seldom witty, are almost always brisk. Miss Merman makes the most of her numbers; and Ray Middleton who—as the rival gun-toter—has the right voice and looks does a very good job with his.

Annie is a musical put together for the greatest happiness of the greatest number. For a long time to come, no one will be handed any Annie Oakleys to see Annie Oakley perform.

—Louis Kronenberger

New York World-Telegram

MAY 17, 1946

A Bull's Eye for Ethel Merman

Buoyant 'Annie Get Your Gun' Keeps Audience Roaring

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Ethel Merman shot a bull's eye last night with "Annie Get Your Gun." For verve and buoyancy, unslackening, there has seldom if ever been a show like it.

Innumerable contributors to the show deserve high praise. But it was Ethel's party to such an extent that it would not be a bad idea to declare an annual Merman Day of all May 16s in the future.

For the first half of the opening act she keeps the audience weeping with laughter. She appears on the scene as a broad drawling huntress who might have brought her young sisters and brothers straight out of Paul Webb's series of mountaineer cartoons.

From the moment of her wonderful way of falling in love with the handsome Ray Middleton, until she finally gets him, Merman is bright as a whip, sure as her shooting and generously the foremost lady clown of her time.

Wins and Loses.

This saga of Annie Oakley pits her natural genius at the trigger against the sharp shooting of Frank Butler, rifle star of Buffalo Bill's show. Annie's effortless perfection at landing her bullets makes her hero jealous. They split up, and when both their shows are on the rocks, Sitting Bull has the insight to tell Annie that if she lets Frank outshoot her, she'll have him cold.

The story remains a simple steelwork to support the wit, antics, song and dancing of the show.

The star looks slimmer and more attractive than she has in many a show. She sings with all the old lusty vitality, but more color in her voice. She acts her comedy broadly but straight, with the deft timing one expects of her. Annie is more of a character than Merman has usually played, but there is no doubt about what this targeteer is up to from the first moment she steps on the stage.

Others in Cast.

Ray Middleton makes a splendid companion in affairs of heart or clay pigeon for Merman's Annie. He is a giant with the looks autograph hunters love, and a voice that can make the Imperial tremble with no effort.

Marty May is the glib manager of the Buffalo Bill company, and Lea Penman is the buxom trouble maker of the troupe. Betty Anne Nyman and Kenny Bowers are gay and skittish in their dancing songs as the juvenlies of the Cody outfit, and William O'Neal is a picturesque Colonel Cody himself.

Harry Bellaver makes Sitting Bull succinctly entertaining, and the more spectacular dance numbers are nimbly leapt through by Lubov Roudenko and Daniel Nagrin.

The girls in "Annie" have the beauty and character of looks one associates with a Rodgers and Hammerstein show. And the production has in every way the distinction that has become their hallmark.

Irving Berlin has not only noted down a lilting and effective score, but added some delightfully comical lyrics. "They Say It's Wonderful," "Lost in His Arms" and "Sun in the Morning" will be heard for many a moon. There is a tricky idea of wit and charm in Annie's "Moonshine Lullaby," and some grand risible stuff for her in "Doin' What Comes Naturally" and "You Can't Get a Man With a Gun."

Good Plot.

The book that Herbert and Dorothy Fields have written is one of the neatest. Plot never snares the pace, and when story is in the foreground the players are usually shouting lines over the audience's laughter. Under Joshua Logan's direction the show moves through the quickest two and a half hours you are likely to find in any theater. It wastes no more time than the seagull does after Annie pots him when she is hungry for a sandwich.

Jo Mielziner gives it all a magnificent series of settings. Most memorable are the Pullman car, the tent arena and the raspberry colored ballroom of the Hotel Brevoort. The trick shift in pattern of the opening and closing curtains brought lively applause last night.

Helen Tamiris deserves congratulations for the lively way she fills the stage with bounding motion for the dances. She has used the patterns of the period, and spread them with a real sense of flowing lightness and lift. There is nothing in the show that could be accused of being a ballet.

Splendid Costumes.

Much of the brilliance of "Annie" in the watching is a credit to Lucinda Ballard. She makes a blazing pageant of the Indian number, and has devised a number of dazzling and extremely becoming outfits for Miss Merman.

It is not often that a sense of electric assurance fills a theater with the opening of an overture. But last night it was evidence with the first notes of music that Jay Blockton and his men knew they had something and were enjoying it.

The New York Times

MAY 17, 1946.

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

The inadvertently postponed "Annie Get Your Gun" finally arrived at the Imperial last evening, and turned out to be a good professional Broadway musical. It has a pleasant score by Irving Berlin—his first since "This Is the Army"—and it has Ethel Merman to roll her eyes and to shout down the rafters. The colors are pretty, the dancing is amiable and unaffected, and Broadway by this time is well used to a book which doesn't get anywhere in particular. "Annie," in short, is an agreeable evening on the town, and it takes little gift for prophecy to add that it, and she, will chant their saga of the sharpshooting lady for many months to come.

By now, Miss Merman is regarded as heaven's gift to the musical show, and there is nothing about the new one to detract from that reputation. They have given her the part of Annie Oakley, who shot with Buffalo Bill's show, and Miss Merman is deadly with a rifle over her shoulder. She can scream out the air of a song so that the building trembles; and she can be initiated into an Indian tribe in such a way the event is singularly funny. Herbert and Dorothy Fields, as librettists, quite often have left her working in something of a void, but she has worked there before and can handle the situation adequately. Her inflections give a leering note to even sedate lyrics, and the toss of her head would be a credit to Bill's show, as it is to that of Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Mr. Berlin's return to home ground is news of high and important order. For that homecoming, he has written a good, steady score, with numbers which fit the events and the story. There is nothing like "White Christmas" or "Easter Parade" among them, but several which have a place a bracket or so below. "They Say It's Wonderful" is the love song, and that will be heard around; and "Moonshine Lullaby," "I'm an Indian Too," "Show Business" and "Sun in the Morning" all are good. Abandoning the piano for the accompanying pencil of the lyricist, Mr. Berlin has fitted gay, brisk words to his tunes, and he is blessed by singers who can enunciate them.

* * *

Although the shooting of "Annie Get Your Gun" is done most affably by Miss Merman and Mr. Berlin, there are others involved to a more or less important extent. Jo Mielziner's settings are in the style of lavish musical shows, colorful and complete. The costumes by Lucinda Ballard are summery, bright, Indian, wild West and when the time is ripe, sardonic. Helen Tamiris has designed dances which probably will not be studied at formal ballet schools but fit agreeably into the porceedings. The contributors all are professionals.

In any Merman show the other members of the acting company habitually take on the harassed air of the losing horses in a steeplechase. Ray Middleton is the Frank Bntler of "Annie," Frank being the lady's rival and sweetheart, and Mr. Middleton offering a voice to Mr. Berlin and no great acting ability otherwise. William O'Neal is a dignified Buffalo Bill; Marty May is energetic as his manager; Harry Bellaver is fine as Chief Sitting Bull. The young people are played by Betty Anne Nyman and Kenny Bowers. The chorus is pleasant to look upon, the orchestrations are good, and if there are abrupt pauses with some frequency—well, Miss Merman must change costumes and Mr. Berlin is not writing continuous opera.

Journal American

MAY 17, 1946

'Annie Get Your Gun' At Imperial Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

Tell me, how does a theatre reporter begin when he sits down to write a rave review? A really rave review, I mean; not merely a half-hearted little piece with "ifs" and "ands" and "buts" scattered here and there among the "goods" and "fines" and, St. Genisius help us, "provocatives." I, a member of the working press and a theatre reporter in fair-to-middling standing, have forgotten how to let myself and my typewriter go.

It has been so long, now, since an "Annie Get Your Gun" has come along to make a rave review a practical necessity. But here it is, riding high, wide and handsome into the Imperial, with story by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, songs by Irving Berlin, backgrounds by Jo Mielziner, costumes by Lucinda Ballard, dances by Helen Tamiris and a princely production with Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2nd written over it.

Really now, how should this rave review begin? A report on last night's new arrival calls for superlatives, for "brilliant" and "bountiful" and "beautiful"; for "romantic" and "melodious" and, if I know what I mean, "kaleidoscopic." And a special group of wonder words for Ethel Merman, its star, the former song-and-dance show lady who is now an actress, a comedienne and a singer rolled quite magically into one...

What I want to say is that "Annie Get Your Gun" is far and away the best musical in town. Well, why not say it? Very well, then! "Annie Get Your Gun" is far and away the best musical in town.

* * *

If These Be Raves

And why is "Annie Get Your Gun" the best musical in town? I'll tell you. It's the best musical in town because it has everything the best musical in town should have. It has a rich, romantic story which begins at the beginning, continues through the middle and stops when it gets to the end. It tells, according to the rules, how "Boy" Frank Butler meets "Girl" Annie Oakley, loses her, then wins her back again.

It has a rich, melodious score which is easy to listen to, simple to remember and pleasant to hear and rehear. Its accompanying lyrics are brilliant, each suited to the melody, the moment and the mood. You'll be hearing even more of "It's Wonderful," "Doin' What Comes Naturally," "Moonshine Lullaby," "Sun in the Morning" and "Lost in His Arms." And of the "Show Business" which stems straight from Broadway's bathetic heart.

Acting out its rich romantic story, singing out its rich melodic songs, are flesh and footlight characters who are part and parcel of that story and to whom those songs belong. Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill, Dolly Tate and Winnie Tate, Charlie Davenport and Sitting Bull, Frank Butler and Annie Oakley, not forgetting Annie's little sisters, Minnie, Jessie and Nellie, and her little brother, Jake, are as alive as they are likable...

Maybe this is getting to be the rave review I started out to write without quite knowing how to go about it. That is the way I want it. "Annie Get Your Gun" really is musical tops on Broadway.

* * *

Whys and Wherefore

As for that erstwhile song-and-dance show lady who is now an actress, a comedienne and a singer rolled quite magically into one, you've a new and exciting Ethel Merman on the stage of the Imperial. But it's a new and exciting Ethel Merman built on the fine and firm foundation of the old one. She's no longer Miss Merman acting like Ethel Merman. She's Miss Merman acting like Annie Oakley. Something important has been added.

Ray Middleton is a make-believe Frank Butler the real Frank Butler could take stock in. He's a new kind of singing boy-friend, a new kind to be encouraged. Harry Bellaver is fiercely funny as Sitting Bull, the Indian Chief who can't raise anything on the land the Government gave him because it's cluttered up with oil. And Nancy Raab, Camilla de Witt, Marlene Cameron and Clifford Sales are adorable Oakley offspring.

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2nd have endowed their musical by other hands with brilliance, bounty and beauty. But without an excess of any one of them. The brilliance is for Joshua Logan's direction, the bounty is for Lucinda Ballard's costumes and the beauty is for Helen Tamiris' dances. Or any way you care to rearrange them. The orchestra, under Jay Blackton, is outstanding, doing well by the orchestral complications...

Looking over what I've written, maybe this is a rave review. It is meant to be. Not since one March night in 1943, at the St. James Theatre, have I had so high a musical time on Broadway. I'll say its wonderful, this "Annie Get Your Gun."

"Swan Song"

PM
Evening

MAY 17, 1946

—Kronenberger—

More Arsenic And Old Hat

PM Reviews

In *Swan Song*, the team of Hecht and MacArthur are serving somewhat as a rescue squad. Their play is a rewrite of a work called *Crescendo*, by Ramon Ramero and Harriett Hinsdale, which was tried out on the road last Winter. I'm afraid that Mr. Hecht and Mr. MacArthur have merely arranged for it to have an expensive burial in New York instead of an obscur. one in the sticks.

Crescendo was, almost certainly, a straight psychological thriller; *Swan Song* emerges as a psychological thriller with conversational and comedy 'hrills. The net gain, I would guess, consists in an occasional amusing line and stretch of colorful talk. But against that must be set a great deal of rather fancy and feeble talk—which, to make matters worse, badly diffuse whatever suspense may have existed in a lot of purple and passe melodrama. Mr. Hecht and Mr. MacArthur have not only brought their personal touch to a poor sort of play; they have brought it to the wrong sort.

Swan Song concerns a psychotic young pianist, as jealously ambitious as he is hopelessly untalented, who poisons his more richly endowed rivals. He has already dispatched his gifted sister, and now plots the death of a 12-year-old girl prodigy while she is actually auditioning at the keyboard. Before he is through, he becomes quite a menace, but it is probably violating no great secret to announce that he is finally outwitted.

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The melodrama in *Swan Song* is grandiloquently engineered, but does provide a few minutes of crude excitement at the very end. Otherwise it is either hoary or hammy; while for two-thirds of the evening, action is suspended in favor of talk and renditions on the pianoforte. Some of the talk is playful; some of it is coated with psychiatric and artistic mucilage; some of it is at the expense of the critics.

Most of the piano-playing is done by 12-year-old Jacqueline Horner, the child prodigy of the play, and herself something of a prodigy in private life. Her creditable, if scarcely brilliant, playing adds to the interest of the evening; but she has not nearly the personality or acting ability to bring to the play what Deanna Durbin, as a youngster with a voice, brought to her early films. The others in the large cast were, in the main, passable; but *Swan Song* is a poky thriller, and more a blurred palimpsest than a play.

—Louis Kronenberger

'SWAN SONG.'

Play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur; based on a story by Ramon Romero and Harriett Hinsdale; staged by Joseph Fevney; setting and lighting by Ralph Alswang; presented by John Clein at the Booth Theater Wednesday evening, May 15, 1946. The cast:

Louise Kubin	Marianne Stewart
Titoh	Ivan Simpson
Eric Moore	Scott McKay
Stella Hemingway	Mary Servoss
Victor Remezoff	Michael Dalmatoff
Stanislaus Kubin	Theo Goetz
Vera Novak	Jacqueline Horner
Leo Pollard	David Ellin
Katya	Kasia Orzazewski
Sister Aratha	Leni Stengel
Max Vennell	Harry Sothern
Gustav Wexler	Louis Sorin
Oscar Mutzenbauer	Rand Elliot
Ruth Trefon	Barbara Perry
Dr. Corbett	Owen Coll
Captain Bartow	Arthur L. Sachs
Nurse	Mary Jones

SYNOPSIS: Act I—The entire action takes place in the Long Island home of Stanislaus Kubin. Time, the present. Act II—Scene 1: Three weeks later. Morning. Scene 2: That evening. Act III—Later that evening.

New York Herald Tribune

MAY 16, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Swan Song?

A CHOPIN POLONAISE is the vague focal point for embarrassing melodramatic shindigs in "Swan Song." It is possible, of course, that Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur composed the new play at the Booth Theater as a huge joke. They thumb their noses at the critics in more than one passage, with more epigrammatic vigor than eloquence. They get a lot of characters on stage only to plop them down to listen to some pianistic pyrotechnics. They toss off dialogue which would suggest that they were burlesquing psychological stage thrillers. If they were having fun at an audience's expense, however, they have neglected to let spectators in on the merriment.

• • •

For "Swan Song" is an unmitigated bore. Rewritten from an earlier dramatic failure by Ramon Romero and Harriett Hinsdale, it pokes into the recesses of a musical maniac's mind, the talents of a twelve-year-old piano prodigy and the recollections of an old gaffer who studied under Liszt, with a minimum of edification or entertainment. It is lucky indeed for the alleged play doctors that they have a nice youngster, who knows how to play the piano, in the chief role. Little Jacqueline Horner does little enough to save the show when she is coping with a neurotic rival or is being poisoned by him in the very middle of an audition. But she contributes grateful interludes of melody and harmony to a dramatic deadfall.

• • •

The piece was originally called "Crescendo" when it died on the road a few months ago. By any title it has the same aroma. A talented tot engages the complete attention of a maestro, whose most gifted protege has supposedly killed herself in the full bud of her career. The latter's brother, who likes to pound the ivories himself, moves in on the professor and his pupil, having been sprung from a laughing academy, gets his hands on a can of rose-bug poison and almost does in the juvenile Landowska. This reviewer cannot report faithfully on the final comeuppance of the musical murderer. He can assure you that at 11 p. m. things were getting duller and duller on the stage of the Booth Theater.

• • •

Miss Horner is quite a virtuoso, if she really is twelve, but Town Hall would be a better setting for her arpeggios than Broadway. When she is asked to make believe that she is a cute, wide-eyed victim of a dastardly homicide attempt, she is no better than wide-eyed. As a matter of fact, David Ellin romps through a couple of piano numbers with considerably more authority than she exhibits. Scott McKay is the critical whipping boy. Theo Goetz mumbles incredible lines as the maestro, and Ivan Simpson, Louis Sorin and Harry Sothern play their parts as though they were members of an art company in the middle of Mittel-europa. There is little artistry to be found in "Swan Song" when the piano is silent.

New York Post

MAY 16, 1946

Hecht and MacArthur Hit Low Notes in 'Swan Song'

By Vernon Rice

Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur said some things about critics in their new play, "Swan Song," which came into the Booth last night—none of it favorable. Witty, but not favorable.

We shall venture a guess that today the gentlemen on the aisles will bow low from the waist and will return the compliment. Not about them, but about their play. For the truth is that it is inconceivable these two quixotic zanies of letters who were responsible for "Front Page" were also responsible for "Swan Song."

They could be forgiven on the score that "Swan Song" is not all theirs, but a rewriting of "Crescendo," which was tried out earlier in the season by the producer, John Clein, and found wanting.

What it was wanting we can guess. Mr. Clein, apparently, thought it was wanting a couple of expert playwrights. Actually, judging by what went on on the stage of the Booth last evening, all it was wanting was a quick burial.

Scattered through this psychological thriller about a young man thwarted as a pianist out to "git" a 12-year-old child prodigy were some lines with the brittle Hecht-MacArthur punch, but there also were many other lines that echoed with their hollowness.

Ralph Alswang created an elaborate interior set in which the actors tried valiantly to stir up some interest and suspense, but about the only one who was at all successful was young Jacqueline Horner, around whom the play was written. She's cute, she's charming and she's natural. She is also a whiz at the piano.

It may not have been too bad an idea to have just had her play the piano for a couple of hours.

But, then, there would have been no play.

Perhaps that would have been just as well.

The New York Times
MAY 16, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

In "Swan Song" Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur are briskly on the trail of a murdering musician —not a killer of music but one of pianists. It is possible that as practical men the loftiest muse is not their forte, for their latest collaboration is no "Front Page," no "Twentieth Century." Indeed, to be as blunt about it as their villain and, it is to be hoped, somewhat less psychopathic, the new melodrama now attending the Booth is pretty inferior. As it should not be from the Messrs. Hecht and MacArthur, it is talky; as it should be from no one, it is old-fashioned and slow. Musicians are hard people to kill satisfactorily, and one of the better combinations in the playwriting business has not succeeded this time.

* * *

"Swan Song," which is based on a story by Ramon Romero and Harriett Hinsdale, probably comes under the heading of a psychological melodrama. At all events, there is no secret about the killer, the potential killer. He had been overshadowed as a pianist by his sister, and, after her death, had attended a sanitarium. As the play opens, he arrives at the home of the sister's teacher, the "maestro" who lately had found a twelve-year old genius and is schooling her. The young man again finds his talent pushed aside, and the rest of the play recounts his efforts to remove the source of the shadow. There are musical clues and beetle poison scattered about before the Messrs Hecht and MacArthur decide to bring down their final curtain in a manner which will remain, for this note, their secret.

It obviously is unfair to attack playwrights on the basis of comparative statistics, but "Swan Song" definitely is from their deep-middle or lower drawer. It starts slowly, with what seem to be endless and dubiously contrived epigrams about musicians' temperament and music critics, the latter a sinister class. It continues slowly, building up very little suspense and using all the old tricks of the trade—sentiment, the faith of a child, the revolver, the aged retainer who is a little dim. Probably to say that "Swan Song" just contains no news is to tell most of the background story. As a play it needs editing; its dialogue needs additional sparkle; some of the patness of incident should be thrown to—well, the music critics.

There is one bit of news in "Swan Song," however, that being the performance of Jacqueline Horner as the young student. According to the program's kindly supplied "Who's Who," Miss Horner, who is twelve, recently offered a recital at Town Hall, and before that played in the West. Let the gentleman next door say how she plays; sufficient that last evening it sounded well and, in addition, the young lady is a capable actress. She has simplicity rather than a simper, and is natural on the stage. David Ellin, also making a debut, is the neurotic boy, and he is occasionally led by the script into emotional traps. Theo Goetz is good as the teacher, and Louis Sorin gives an amusing portrait of a concert manager. Marianne Stewart, as the daughter of the teacher, is half the love interest; Scott McKay, as the critic, is the other. Joseph Pevney's direction could not hide the stretches of inertia; Ralph Alswang's setting appears fair enough for a musician's Long Island home.

New York World-Telegram
MAY 16, 1946

Hecht and MacArthur Offer 'Swan Song'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Swan Song," the new drama about music and madness by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, is based on a concept which was popular 15 to 20 years ago. It is made stylish by certain comments on unapplied psychiatry. But it remains a transparent and old-fashioned saga that might easily serve to frighten out of her wits the prodigious young Jacqueline Horner, who walks away with the evening.

It is difficult to see why the Messrs. Hecht and MacArthur bother with it. The only sign of their crisp wit appears in certain gratuitous wisecracks scattered about, and in one bright scene written around the impresario played by Louis Sorin.

The authors have enjoyed an opportunity to reel off a number of barbed comments about critics. That is fair game. But the whole story could have been spared the telling if it were not for the preposterous assumption that a music critic fails to recognize in his own playing one of the most familiar arias in operatic literature.

Theme of Play.

If memory serves, Mr. Hecht some years ago turned out a first-rate thriller called "The Florentine Dagger," which hinged on a living parallel to the story of "La Tosca." In this case "Otello" is dragged in by his ebony larynx for what is hardly more than a wild comparison.

"Swan Song" assumes fairly enough that youthful genius, forced and ambitious, may warp a personality until it loses its balance. A persecution complex is the lifeline against disappointment. Finally ingenious violence may be reflexive in the tortured artist.

This is a theme with the makings of real excitement. The trouble with it here is its pretension of suspense.

The situation becomes clear to a layman early in the day. Yet the clews, which clarify the affair to the audience mean nothing to the musicians, teachers and impresario on the stage, though the trail is blazed with melody and artistic temperament.

Miss Horner Competent.

The play deliberates at a ponderous tempo for the most part. Here and there it brightens up with a gag that sounds as if it came out of a file indexed for just such an occasion. It gets a grip on the audience only twice, once in an ingenious and logical incident involving the two young pianists, and again at the finish.

Jacqueline Horner, who is 12 in the play and probably after it is over, too, gives a graceful and unaffected performance as the child pianist. She is sure and sweet and must not go into pictures for years.

Besides being a natural actress she is an excellent musician. She plays the piano with intensity and a force amazing for her stature.

Louis Sorin is engaging and great good fun as the Hurok of the play. A majority of what light lines there are fall to him, and he delivers them with relish.

David Ellin, no mean pianist himself, struggles valiantly as the neurotic second prodigy. He summons up a welter of hysteria for his melodramatic moments. In the calmer sequence he has not the resource to keep the character from swaying to the slightest breeze.

Marianne Stewart, whose figure deserves to be pinned up, is one of the few calm elements in a nerve wracked cast. She is attractive and cool in a negative role.

Goetz as Maestro.

A basic weakness of the play is the casting of Theo Goetz as the Maestro. Spoken of freely as a famed tempestuous and amorous artist, he has until the final scene all the fire and temperament of an elevator operator.

Scott McKay is pleasant enough as the critic, though he looks and acts little like the wolf his lady suggests he is.

Ivan Simpson is the unfortunate gardener who is kind to little roses, and Mary Servoss plays the former musician who has the pen with which Massenet wrote "Manon," and sleeps with it.

Leni Stengel is gentle as the Nun, and Barbara Perry displays a physique which makes up for the one line she never gets to say.

There is an effective set by Ralph Alswang for the show which was staged by Joseph Pevney.

The Sun

MAY 16, 1946

'Swan Song,' Hecht and MacArthur Play, Dawdles and Is Lacking in Suspense.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Those jaunty dramatists, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, write of music, musicians and murder in "Swan Song," put on last night at the Booth by John Clein. This new melodrama has its chill-and-shudder moments here and there but it is generally a dawdling affair and is by no means the expert job of playmaking to be expected from the authors of "The Front Page."

Here is the story of the terror that comes upon a household when a celebrated maestro tries to devote himself to two young proteges at the same time. One of them is a 12-year-old girl pianist who has come to him from a convent; the other prodigy is a boy, just out of a mental sanitarium, whose sister, a brilliant musician, went to her death as an apparent suicide.

The maestro's interest is centered on the remarkable little girl and he arranges an audition for her, but the envious and neurotic boy tries to crush her fingers and later gives her poison, which brings on her collapse as she is at the piano playing Chopin's Polonaise. The girl recovers and only a ruse on the part of the maestro saves her life for a second time.

Hecht and MacArthur have created a musical atmosphere that is real enough and they have brought forth a delightful child actress, as well as an excellent pianist, in young Jacqueline Horner, but their play is too slow, too diffuse, to be a good thriller and there is actually little suspense. The maniacal young killer, who did in his own sister because she was an obstacle to his musical advancement, is spotted for what he is just as soon as he appears. The role is rather overplayed by David Ellin.

Theo Goetz does well as the aging teacher, who has a rather harrowing evening. Marianne Stewart is very attractive as his daughter, in love with a smug music critic, and it's Scott McKay who has the burden of speaking that fellow's dialogue, so arch, so unreal and overpoweringly elaborate it might well have been written for Sheridan Whiteside's younger brother. Louis Sorin and Harry Sothern are quite believeable as two men of music and Ivan Simpson putters about as the harmless old gardener who is finally driven to suicide. There is a good interior setting by Ralph Alswang.

"Swan Song," based on a story by Ramon Romero and Harriett Hinsdale (they wrote their story into a play called "Crescendo"), and staged by Joseph Pevney, was presented last night at the Booth without an out-of-town tryout. This new Hecht & MacArthur play lacks compactness and cumulative suspense. It is no more than fair as a murder melodrama.

Journal American

MAY 16, 1946

'Swan Song' Opens At Booth Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

All last evening I had the eerie feeling that I had sat through this don't-shoot-the-piano-player stuff before. But when? And where? Then, with nothing happening elsewhere to distract my peaceful recollections, my thoughts went back to a dark midwinter night in the Hartford, which is the capital of Connecticut. There, in a remote memorial known as Bushnell, this same little girl played the same big Steinway while—

Now, I've got it! It WAS Hartford, midwinter and the Bushnell Memorial. There and then, the little girl's vehicular name was Eloise; the little girl's vehicle was "Crescendo" and the begetters of the little girl's vehicle were Ramon Romero and Harriet Hinsdale. There and then, as here and now, the little girl—the piano player who doesn't get shot—was Jacqueline Horner, who should stick to her Steinway.

As last January's "Crescendo," this May's "Swan Song" had a supporting cast in which were Nance O'Neill and Sara Anderson; Neil Hamilton and Ralph Morgan; Hugh Rennie and Tito Vuolo. Each time little Miss Horner left her piano-playing corner to indulge in a bit of acting, one of these tried and true old-timers rushed to her rescue... Yes, it all comes back to me. Even the "thematic music" Sigmund Romberg made up on purpose!

In four short months, "Crescendo" has changed to "Swan Song," Romero and Hinsdale have changed to Hecht and MacArthur, and Hartford's Bushnell Memorial has changed to New York's Booth Theatre. Stranger things have happened. But I don't know when!

Prize Pupil

By Hecht and by MacArthur—Ben, of course, and Charlie—this is now a "new play" entitled "Swan Song" and "based on a story" by the aforesaid Romero and Hinsdale. And the aforesaid Eloise has changed her name to Vera and the aforesaid "themetic music" by Mr. Romberg has been discarded. In desperation, the practically indestructible piano-player in 45th St. falls back on a "Polonaise" by a Mr. Chopin.

The rewrite goes on—but none too rapidly—to tell how, in the high and handsome Long Island living-room of Stanislaus Kubin, little Miss Novak, residing in a convenient convent, is the pet pupil of the good old maestro's eye. He alone realizes that, if she practices every day and meets the proper critics, she will become the female Levant of her atomic age and generation. Like Oscar, Vera has everything!

For three acts, for four scenes, he does more than right by her. Day after day, he has her brought over to his house by Sister Agatha. There, she runs up her scales and down her "Polonaise" with dutiful deliberation. But, in the offing, the villain—frustrated Oscar Levant, if you can imagine such a contradiction—plots to kill her. He would kill her, too, were she not as tough as taffy.

Up on the Booth's unfeeling stage, the female of the piano-playing species is almost, but not quite, crushed by a crashing keyboard cover; almost, but not quite, poisoned by a punchbowl mickey-finn, almost, but not quite, shot by a madman with a pistol.

Bright Baby

Come what does, the little lady keeps on playing. And nothing I could put on paper in praise of Jacqueline Horner could outpraise what the programs hard by Shubert Alley have to say in connection with the musical performer. There's nothing she can't do. And without half trying. Solo recitals, motion-pictures, play-acting, doll collecting, horseback riding, motor boating, rifle shooting, modern dancing—

These, along with fencing, swimming, writing and drawing, explain how, at the age of 12, she is the "avowed sweetheart" of co-authors Ben and Charlie, who "freely admit" that she is the principal reason they got together to translate "Crescendo" into "Swan Song." As no music critic, I think Miss Horner plays the piano nicely for a youngster. As a drama critic, I'm sure she has a lot to learn about acting.

This time, in her supporting cast, are Theo Goetz, from "European repertory stages"; Scott McKay, from "stage, screen and radio"; David Ellin, from "Monreal, Canada, and the Conservatoire"; Michael Dalmatoff, from "Russia, France and Hollywood"; Louis Sorin, from "operetta, dialect and radio" and—here I'm on familiar ground—Mary Servoss, from the pleasant pages of my memory book. Joseph Pevney directed honestly...

Once in a while, the real Hecht-MacArthur touch seeps through in "Swan Song." At most times, however, I've a hunch that the "Front Page" boys rewrote "Crescendo" for Jacqueline Horner's better piano-playing and against their own better judgment.

DAILY NEWS

MAY 16, 1946

Psychiatry, Pianists and Poison Make 'Swan Song' Mild Thriller

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "Swan Song" Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur have a play which is not quite a chiller, but which could be a pleasant enough Summer cooler. It mixes a great deal of musical atmosphere and music talk with some psychiatry and turns loose a killer who thinks he is a genius but merely is mad.

In one respect "Swan Song" is unique. The center of the stage and the story is a piano—and actors actually play it. To me, a piano in the theatre is an abomination, because it usually means that some Equity member is going to sit at the blasted thing and pretend to strum it while making light observations on life and love, while in the wings some stooge from the Musicians' Union is doing the work on his own machine.

But in last evening's affair at the Booth, Jacqueline Horner, age 12, played both an important role and a parlor grand very creditably. David Ellin enacted the young madman convincingly and gave the Steinway a workout besides. Even Scott McKay, portraying a music critic, managed to pick out a couple of phrases with one finger. Producer John Clein rates a bow for having found such actors.

Good Type Casting.

Mr. Clein also has found some good non-playing players—Ivan Simpson as a gardener, Mary Servoss as a woman whose hunger for culture almost equals her craving for sex, Theo Goetz as a piano teacher, Louis Sorin as a concert manager and other interesting types.

The story—originally a piece of fiction by Ramon Romero and Harriett Hinsdale—turns around a child prodigy and a young man, fresh from a mental breakdown, who once had a sister who was a child prodigy until she died. It isn't a mystery play, but a psychological meller. I can see no reason for going very deeply into the plot.

"Swan Song" builds its situations and establishes its characters at a leisurely pace. Its mood is andante, rather than the prestissimo of that Hecht-MacArthur gem, "The Front Page." But it mounts steadily and the denouement is pleasantly exciting—although it won't exactly scare anybody out of a year's growth. And, once in awhile, the authors drop back into their old style and provide some sharply barbed lines. Most of these barbs are aimed at critics. Music critics, though, so I agreed with and enjoyed the cracks.

There is an attractive set by Ralph Alswang. Joseph Pevney directed, and I think his awe of MacArthur and Hecht kept him from dealing quite firmly enough with them. I'd take about 10 minutes out of "Swan Song."

"Uncle Vanya"

The Old Vic is repertory theatre, space permits us to reproduce only four newspaper reviews of each of their four presentations.

New York Post

MAY 14, 1946

Old Vic's 'Uncle Vanya' Displays Ensemble Playing

By Vernon Rice

"Uncle Vanya" is decadence on display. The Chekhov play as done by the Old Vic Company last night at the Century, as another theatre piece to add to its six-week repertory season in New York, becomes a display of ensemble playing seldom seen in the theatre today enhanced by direction which gave this playing mood, quality and style.

There will be those who will find this classic of Russian naturalism not their particular cup of tea. If so, don't put the blame on these London players. Blame Chekhov. What was timely yesterday becomes archaic today.

Chekhov plays have no themes. They don't try to prove anything. They are simply character plays with the playwright and the audience making observations.

In "Uncle Vanya," the author presents a group of thwarted, frustrated unhappy people, who spend their lives in pointless pursuit of the unobtainable, and rather enjoy themselves in their misery. He asks you to look at them, listen to their talk and observe them as they move from nothing to nothing and end up just where they started at nothing. He doesn't ask you to be moved by them or to be stirred by their problems.

Not Without Humor

He finds his people's pursuit, their constant agonizing not without humor, but the humor comes from character rather than from situation.

Chekhov sets his all-seeing eye on an estate in Southern Russia (the time is the late Nineteenth Century) and he watches with close scrutiny an egoistic professor, his wife and his daughter, his brother-in-law and mother-in-law, a doctor, a friend, and an old nurse.

Nothing happens, except a few slight involvements, because the people themselves are without hope, without life, without aspirations. All they have are their own decadence and self-pity.

To put this play across the Old Vic troupe relies on its ability to act as a unit. The individual player has his chance and turn to show off his wares, but this time, it is the group, rather than the individual, that garners the acting honors.

Where the individual shines is in versatility. Laurence Olivier, as the doctor, Astrov; Ralph Richardson playing the professor's brother-in-law, the title role, Uncle Vanya; Ena Burrill as the nurse; Nicholas Hannen in the part of the professor, and Margaret Leighton as his wife, make the change from the historical drama, "Henry IV," of last week to the Russian naturalism of this week's offering, with amazing and incredible ease.

It is Joyce Redman, however, who takes the versatility honors this time. Last week frowsy, bawdy, drunken Doll Tearsheet; this week, frustrated, inhibited, defeated Sonya. It is impossible to say how she does it, but the young woman is an actress to her last eye-lash.

John Burrell's work is a masterpiece of direction. His slow pace of the first act firmly establishes the mood of the play and his timing of the eloquent silent moments give it distinction.

Tanya Moiseiwitsch's costumes and sets are in the proper spirit.

It is the team work of the company, however, that should get the concentrated critical plaudits.

'UNCLE VANYA.'

Play by Anton Chekhov, translated by Constance Garnett; staged by John Burrell; scenery and costumes by Tanya Moiseiwitsch; lighting by John Sullivan; played by the Old Vic Theater Company and presented by Theater Incorporated at the Century Theater Monday evening, May 13, 1946. The cast:

Marina (the family nurse)....Ena Burrill
Astrov (a doctor).....Laurence Olivier
Voynitsky ("Uncle Vanya").....Ralph Richardson
The Professor.....Nicholas Hannen
Yelena (the professor's second wife).....Margaret Leighton
Sonya (the professor's daughter by his first wife, Vanya's sister).....Joyce Redman
Telyegin ("Waffles").....George Relph
Marya Voynitsky (Vanya's mother).....Byrony Chapman
Yefim (a peasant servant).....William Monk

PM

MAY 15, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

The Old Vic In Old Russia

PM Reviews

The important thing at the Century Monday night was that, after a period of 16 years, *Uncle Vanya* was once again playing on a New York stage. That, indeed, was the decisive thing. As a particular Old Vic production, it was often open to fairly withering criticism. As something for the Old Vic to have selected for America, it was a great mistake in judgment. For Americans, a palpably British rendering of Chekhov consists in getting him not at one but at two removes, in a kind of double translation; it is almost as though an American should set about reading Voltaire in German.

The trouble piled up, moreover, in the production itself. The direction, where it was careful, drew attention to its carefulness: the whole first act, for example, seemed infernally fussy and slow. The direction, where it was misguided, was blatantly misguided: the scene of the shooting, for example, lost both its dramatic seriousness and its proper kind of humor; it became a sort of Keystone Comedy chase through the house. The Constance Garnett translation, which is too British for our ears and too literary for anybody's, was often set forth in all its naked weakness. And as ensemble playing, something that a famous repertory company rather guarantees and that a Chekhov play requires, this *Uncle Vanya* was uneven. Certain roles seemed miscast, certain others misplayed.

The result, then, was often disappointing and now and then disastrous. It was disappointing to see so very good an actor as Ralph Richardson as Uncle Vanya. He was still, in many ways, a very good actor; but he was not Uncle Vanya. It was not entirely satisfying to have Laurence Olivier, despite his skill and authority, as the Doctor. The Doctor is not quite his dish; and with his fine comedy talent and after his performance in *Henry IV* as Shallow, I wish he had played the Professor. I wish, at any rate, that Nicholas Hannen had not played the Professor; he struck, for me, the most jarring note of the evening. I wish, too, that certain scenes had not given the audience openings for the wrong kind of laughs; and above all, that the company had seemed to catch more of Chekhov's spirit.

• • •

But this *Uncle Vanya* was not all waste, either. Mr. Olivier and Mr. Richardson at least know how to act; and Joyce Redman, in an astonishing running of the gamut after her blowsy, low-comedy Doll Tearsheet, knows how to act Sonia. Hers was a touching, tremulous and controlled performance; and George Relph, in the hovering role of Telvegin, played with style. And for all the misplaced humor and failure in tone, this *Uncle Vanya* showed a desire, at least, to treat Chekhov on *his* terms. There was none of Lynn Fontanne's flashiness in *The Sea Gull*, none of the overt philistinism of our most recent *Cherry Orchard*.

And there was the play itself. *Uncle Vanya* may fall below *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*, but it has distinction. To be sure, there is almost nothing in it of what Broadway regards as "theater." Nothing much happens; nothing much can happen; it begins, as it were, at the end. It is a kind of summing-up, a study of frustrated and self-pitying people; of a better man, who wasted his life serving a fool; of sensitive men who waste their feelings on a shallow woman; of a young girl's unrequited love and an old man's peevish selfishness. Some of it is "gloomy." But it is not tragic—except as all waste is tragic.

And the atmosphere of the play is not the last word on it. The softness, the weakness, are in the peope, not in Chekhov, who in the good and final sense was one of the most hardboiled writers who ever lived. He was infinitely humane, but utterly implacable. He pardons his people, but he does not acquit them. He cuts beyond their moods to their make-ups, through the personal pathos of their situations to the cosmic humor. *Uncle Vanya* has not, to be sure, all the merit of *The Three Sisters* or *The Cherry Orchard*, but possibly one reason *why we like it less* is that it has not their charm.

Yet it remains among the important plays in the modern theater. I can only hold out three fingers to the Old Vic production. But my thumb is up for Chekhov.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York World-Telegram

MAY 14, 1946

Poor Directing Mars Old Vic's 'Uncle Vanya'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The important thing which the Old Vic Company accomplished last night in presenting Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya" was to show New York the capacities of its leading ladies.

The talent and ability of Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson are no surprise after the "Henry" of last week, if they were before. But this time Joyce Redmond and Margaret Leighton come into their own.

After her broad and blowzy antics as Doll Tearsheet, Miss Redmond displays a miracle of virtuosity with her Sonya in "Uncle Vanya." Resourcefully she catches the tragedy of the girl in all her frustration and weariness. She makes her young in her swift and believable outbursts of brief joy and hysterical sorrow. Yet she makes the girl more mature than her elders with her strange inverted courage.

Yelena Well Portrayed.

This is a difficult role to sustain, but Miss Redmond progresses her delineation even while she is entirely out of the action on the stage. And to her further great credit, she is more consistently articulate to the audience than anyone else in the play.

Margaret Leighton plays the decadent Yelena as an exquisitely swanlike column of alabaster so degenerated with stagnation that you feel she may crumble into dust any moment. She projects the hyper-hothouse quality of Sonya's step-mother with fragile indolence, and makes true Vanya's description of her that she is so lazy she staggers when she walks.

Her boredom, chiefly with herself, seems intensely real, and what emotions she has are futile and selfish. One gets the feeling that she does not equivocate, but that from her indulgence she simply has no mind left to make up.

Olivier is wry and distinctly one of the quick as Astrov, the only character in the play who has virility and a sense of humor about himself. He can bring unexpected brightness and humor to a line with surprise timing or gesture. His character is three dimensional and relaxed, and he vests himself with the real sophistication of one who appreciates the temporality of man.

Richardson as Vanya.

Ralph Richardson has a most difficult assignment as Vanya, the unappreciated worker of this somber hive, who finds that he has no more sting than a drone. He expresses his irritation with the family through peevish sarcasm that in its very childishness reflects the stunting of the life he has led. If when he explodes with anger, the manifestations are infantile, they are believable of his Vanya.

As the Professor, a self indulgent, phony intellectual, Nicholas Hannen does a remarkable job. He does not compromise with the detestable ego of the man. He is mentally a buffoon without a redeeming iota of consideration for anyone else. Yet while he is unbearable to other characters, one rather likes him with the insurance of the footlights between him and the audience.

This is a presentation of performances. From a productional point of view it is frequently inclined to be irritating. Granted that "Uncle Vanya" is a play about bored, disappointed and restive people, it does not seem necessary for their tedium to be so infectious.

Production Faulty.

An attempt is made in the first act to set the sultry negative atmosphere by infinite pauses between speeches. Some of the cues are so long in being picked up that any sense of response dies of suspension.

The wholesale outburst of emotion at the close of the third scene resembles a sample book for a school of melodrama run by the Marx Brothers.

Technically the production has its peculiarities too. In the first scene the sun appears to be setting inside the woodshed. When the storm comes later, thunder cracks right in the lilacs and its zeal mutes all the voices, which were none too resounding in clear weather.

The written play of "Uncle Vanya" has a certain universality in its refinement of common faults like rationalization and waste. It concerns people living on their mental capital, whose hysteria is produced by a marijuana of introspection.

In production here it seems to deal with a remote kind of negated and dolorous rejection which has little if any modern counterpart.

One concludes that any decision to produce "Uncle Vanya" sates actors and students, certainly not a potential commercial audience.

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The New York Times

MAY 14, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Putting aside "King Henry IV" for a moment, the visiting members of London's Old Vic Theatre last evening turned their attention to "Uncle Vanya." Repertory is repertory, including the ups and downs, and it should cause no international incident to say this morning that Chekhov, as represented, does not give a like evening to Shakespeare. Ralph Richardson and Laurence Olivier, the acting mainstays of the Old Vic, again offer thoughtful performances, but not all of their support is on a level. Further, "Uncle Vanya" is not Chekhov at the best.

* * *

The drama has not received a local professional revival since 1930, and it is rather easy to see why. It is a play living in a vacuum, in that nothing happens. It is slow, sprawling and leisurely. The characters are disappointed and defeated; the only action is when one takes two shots at another—and misses. The outlines of the people are there, but to build them into human beings within the confines of the static play takes more thorough study than some of the visitors offer. "Uncle Vanya" must be taken in great seriousness for what it is, but now and then the members of the Old Vic try to lighten the gloom with results that are not satisfactory. By allowing the gouty old bones to dance, they ruin the mood.

Mr. Olivier is Astrov, the doctor, who likes forestry, medicine and vodka. His performance is excellent, and the doctor lives. His attachment for the young wife of the professor is real; his manner is genuine and earnest. Mr. Richardson is Uncle Vanya, making him a flabby, neurotic man who is not quite weak enough to be pathetic nor strong enough to be admirable. Nicholas Hannen is the professor, who is wrapped in self-interest and gout; Margaret Leighton is the young wife and Joyce Redman the daughter. Miss Leighton is coolly beautiful, which is the part; Miss Redman does not seem to give Sonya her due.

Where the Old Vic's adventures of Chekhov do not rise to those of Falstaff and his companions lies in the various moods. "Uncle Vanya" is long and it is gloomy, and there is no denying that. Instead of accepting the fact and going on, however, some of the players and the direction accent lines and bits of business which throw the play off key. At times, it is as though the players were standing aside and looking at their work, instead of giving an honest accounting. They give an audience the impression that those on the stage know that "Uncle Vanya" is sad, and they are prepared to permit a wink under the circumstances. This may not be respectful in the young.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

"On Whitman Avenue"

DAILY NEWS

MAY 9, 1946

'On Whitman Avenue' Offered at the Cort

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Like many dramas with a purpose, "On Whitman Avenue" is more admirable in intent than it is in achievement. This play, written by Maxine Wood and produced last evening at the Cort by Canada Lee and Mark Marvin, is an argument for social equality for the Negro among whites.

As an argument it is intense, but as a drama it is loosely built and written with cliches. What strength it has lies not in the words the author has chosen nor in the acting of the roles, but in its fundamental notion that a decent Negro family which has no prejudice against whites has a right to a nice home.

"On Whitman Avenue" is a bitter play in which the Negro family loses—loses its home, that is, but not its dignity. This home, in a midwestern suburb, is a two-family house in a white neighborhood. In the absence of her parents, a forward-looking white girl rents the upstairs to a colored group.

There are indignation meetings on the part of the neighbors, and resolutions of racial exclusion. Despite the fact that the young girl, her father and one female neighbor stand for equality, the newcomers finally are forced out. It is a horrowing eviction, with a pregnant girl and an old man with heart trouble having no place to go—but it is an eviction nevertheless.

The cast includes Canada Lee as the head of the Negro family, Miss Perry Wilson as the girl who rents the house, Will Geer as her tolerant father, Ernestine Barrier as her intolerant mother and Hilda Vaughn as a sympathetic neighbor.

"ON WHITMAN AVENUE," a play by Maxine Wood, with a setting and lighting by Donald Oenslager, directed by Margo Jones and presented by Canada Lee and Mark Marvin in association with George McLain at the Cort Theater with the following cast:

Johnnie Tildon	Martin Miller
Kate Tildon	Ernestine Barrier
Ed Tildon	Will Geer
Owen Bennett	Richard Williams
Grace Bennett	Augustus Smith
Wint Bennett	Vivienne Baber
Barnie Lund	Kenneth Terry
Aurie Anderson	Hilda Vaughn
Cora Bennett	Abbie Mitchell
Toni Tildon	Perry Wilson
David Bennett	Canada Lee
Jeff Hall	Philip Clarke
Belle Hall	Betty Greene Little
Walter Lund	Robert Simon
Ellen Lund	Jean Cleveland
Wilbur Read	Stephen Roberts
Edna Read	Joanna Albus

SYNOPSIS: The entire action of the play takes place in the Tildons' home in Lawndale, a suburban development in the Mid-West. Act I—Scene 1: September, 1945, about 5 p. m. Scene 2: Dusk, a few hours later. Act II—Scene 1: Five days later, about 5 p. m. Scene 2: Late afternoon of the next day.

The New York Times

MAY 9, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Like many another play of the current season, the performance of "On Whitman Avenue" does not have the full purity of its heart. Maxine Wood is writing about the Negro and the white, and how an antagonistic relationship can and does affect both. She is not a practiced playwright, and the final treatment of a difficult theme has eluded her. It is easy to see why Canada Lee both co-sponsored the drama, which opened at the Cort, and is one of its leading players; but the fact remains that it is just not good theatre.

* * *

The story opens when the liberal daughter of a town storekeeper rents an apartment in the family house to a returned Negro veteran and his relatives. The neighbors grow aroused about land values, about "when one comes, others will follow," about the dangers to white girls. The children take up the quarrel of their parents, their vendettas increasing in brutality. Finally the real estate company brings pressure on the owner until he is forced to give in and tell the Negro tenants to move. It is an incident which could happen, and unfortunately does, but in "On Whitman Avenue" it is a tale told unsatisfactorily.

Miss Wood has a tendency to allow literary allusions to speak for her where the simple language of unquoted simple people would do much better. She also has the trick, which editing could eliminate, of piling incident upon incident, without using much discretion in her choice. Thus, the naturally liberal storekeeper is turned against his beliefs by the real estate company's threatening not to renew the store's lease—an easy, but haggardly melodramatic, way of going about it. Her portraits of the white neighbors are so unflattering as to detract from the honesty of purpose; to ask, as one does, whether Walt Whitman "lives around here," gives a hollow sound. Miss Wood does offer occasional moments of building theatre, but she also offers a good many anticlimaxes.

Caught in the rather overpowering tolls of the script, the players have difficulty in making their contributions seem real. Mr. Lee's part is not a large one, but on occasion he overacts at moments when restraint would more nearly carry the day. As the storekeeper and inadvertent landlord, Will Geer is quietly easy, a contrast to Ernestine Barrier, who as his wife lets everything get the better of her. Perry Wilson is the young girl who puts her democratic ideals into practice by renting the apartment, and Hilda Vaughn is an old-maid neighbor. Margo Jones, who is represented across the street as co-director of "The Glass Menagerie," has not been able to weld "On Whitman Avenue" into a natural shape, although Donald Oenslager has built a set that would hold it. The play's aspirations are honest and sincere, but the effect grows increasingly disappointing.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

MAY 9, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Rocky Street

The latest dramatic indictment of intolerance is by no means the best of the season. "On Whitman Avenue," which has come to the Cort, speaks bravely and with considerable passion about discrimination against the Negro. It says thinbs which certainly need statement and restatement today. Even the fine performing of a mixed cast in which Canada Lee and Perry Wilson are outstanding, however, fails to make the show much more than a rather ragged restatement. he stage demands more dramatic form and substance than is to be found in this new play by Maxine Wood. While it rates a high mark for sincerity, it is lean on theatrical effectiveness.

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The author is on surest ground when she is stating the simple postulate of her theme. The advent of a Negro family in the white district of a Mid-West suburb inspires a logical and sometimes arresting series of conflicts. The hostile reactions of most of the white folk, including the wife of the right-thinking landlord are neatly matched by the resentment of the Negro war hero and his clan when they find that people of their color can die for their country, but have a devil of a time finding a place to live in it. The characters of the piece, from the hot-headed daughter who leases half of a two-family house to a distinguished Negro family in her parent's absence, to a mother-ridden spinster who learns something about tolerance at first hand, have depth and engaging conviction. Unfortunately they find themselves at loose ends before the final curtain.

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As a matter of fact there are times in the final scene when "On Whitman Avenue" appears to have finished and started all over again like a repeating record. It would not be fair to ask for a clean-cut resolution of the theme. But it is too bad that the fine indignation and ramified conflicts of the exposition have not been fused in a climax of power and perception. Whether familiar or not, the material is worthy of more sustained dramatic excitement. As it stands, the Cort offering flares intermittently, but flickers as frequently.

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It never flickers when Canada Lee is dominating the action. The fine actor makes the role of the embittered Negro veteran rounded and resolute. His challenging directness as he accepts the fact that his family may not be wanted by the Tildens is brilliantly projected, as is his rage when a real estate agent takes up a collection to pay for his moving. Miss Wilson is vivid and engaging as the idealistic daughter of the house, and Will Geer supports her performance with an excellent portrayal of the father who is blackmailed into evicting his Negro tenants. Ernestine Barrier has somewhat less success as the mother who makes a pitch for tolerance and then explodes in a tirade against what she terms savages. Hilda Vaughn plays the spinster who discovers that Negroes are not merely savages to the queen's taste. Margo Jones has afforded adequate direction when the script is moving somewhere, little of any when it bogs down. And that, more the pity, is what "On Whitman Avenue" does.

New York Post

MAY 9, 1946

'On Whitman Avenue' Boldly Faces the Negro Problem

By Vernon Rice

Here it is, folks! That play on the Negro question for which we have all been waiting. It arrived last night at the Cort. It is "On Whitman Avenue," a new play by a new playwright, Maxine Wood.

This play we've wanted has been a long time coming and after a season of sitting through "Strange Fruit," "A Young American," "Jeb," and yes, even "Deep Are the Roots," we had begun to wonder if it was ever going to get here.

"Deep Are the Roots" is included in the above line-up not because it is an unsuccessful attempt at presenting the cause for racial equality but because the problem it presents is not one that occurs every minute of our lives.

True, the play does argue against racial and social injustice, but few white girls fall in love with Negro men. On the other hand, there is not anybody, regardless of race, creed or color today, who doesn't want a home, a good and secure home in which to live at peace with his neighbor and with the world.

Dark Alleys and Side Streets

And particularly the Negroes whose lives have been spent in being shoved from dark alleys to side streets, from roofless houses to overcrowded tenements.

In "On Whitman Avenue," a Negro family does get to live in a nice house, a nice, shining Donald Oenslager house, with bright gay flowers and green grass all around it.

They got a chance to live in it because a young college girl, who practiced what she and her family preached, rented the upstairs portion of her family's duplex in Lawndale, a suburban development in the mid-west, to them while the parents were out-of-town attending a convention.

The Negro family consists of a young war veteran, his wife, mother, younger brother and grandfather. The grandfather likes to dig in the yard and the kid brother likes to build airplanes and toss them into the supposedly free air, while the veteran's wife would like to get neighborly and talk about the baby she is going to have.

They don't, however, get much of a chance to do these things. The white families in the neighborhood gang up on them. They hold meetings, make threats, the children fight the little boy and finally they are forced to move.

The owner of the house holds out as long as he can, but in the face of losing his business and his home, and unable to face the unpleasantness caused by his wife, the situation becomes too much for him. The daughter does leave home, there is a suggestion that he might, too, as the curtain falls on a "Craig's Wife" ending.

Problem Not Solved

There might be some criticism that the playwright has not solved her problem, but who has solved this particular problem? What Miss Wood has done, though, is to bring her problem out in the open and to discuss it boldly, candidly and intelligently. That in itself is an achievement.

She has been more than ably assisted by Margo Jones, the director, who has done a masterful job of keeping the play under control and in giving shape to its substance. The director's picturizations and stage groupings in the neighborhood meeting scene was particularly effective.

Canada Lee, who is co-producer of the play with Mark Marvin in association with George McLain, played David Bennett, the Negro veteran with ease and touching naturalness. Abbie Mitchell and Augustus Smith, who played his mother and grandfather, Cora and Gramp Bennett, respectively, have restraint, yet smothered intensity that is exciting to watch.

Good Role for Geer

Will Geer at last has a role that is worthy of his talents in Ed Tilden, the owner of the duplex, and Ernestina Barrier gives an adept characterization, as his selfish and hysterical wife, Kate.

Hilda Vaughn, as Aurie Anderson, a neighbor; Perry Wilson playing Toni Tilden, the liberal daughter of the Tilden household; Vivienne Baber enacting the role of the Negro veteran's wife, Wini, and the three children, Richard Williams, Martin Miller and Kenneth Terry, as well as the rest of the large cast, turned in expert performances.

"On Whitman Avenue" is the sort of play that will please as many of those that it will displease, and whatever happens, it will cause a lot of talk, discussions and arguments, to say nothing of a heated battle or two.

It may be dynamite, for all we know, but if it is, then it is time that it is put to its proper use.

The Sun

MAY 9, 1946

'On Whitman Avenue' Naive and Obvious, Weakest of Race-problem Plays.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"On Whitman Avenue," written by Maxine Wood, is an awkward and straggling drama and quite the weakest of the racial problem plays that have come along this season. Canada Lee, a man of the theater who knows the trade of acting, is in the cast and also serves as co-producer.

This new play sags and drags. It brings forth some of the most strident acting seen hereabouts in many a month. It makes its plea for tolerance very clumsily and in a great multiplicity of scenes, some of which seem to go on forever.

The locale of "On Whitman Avenue" is a suburb in the Mid-West and the play is about the ruction that develops when a young Negro, an ex-G. I., moves with his pregnant wife and his family into the upstairs flat of a home in a white neighborhood.

The upper floor of the Tilden house is rented by the Tildens' daughter, Toni, a 19-year-old liberal, to the Negroes in the absence of her parents. The new tenants were homeless, the G. I. was a war hero, and Toni's father accepts the situation calmly enough. But her mother does not. Nor do the neighbors. Nor the business leaders of the community. Finally, the Negroes pack up and move, only to be followed by the daughter of the Tildens walking out on home and mother.

Canada Lee has moments of believeability as the returned soldier, but he remains a good actor in quest of a script. Donald Oenslager's fine realistic setting, showing the exterior and part of the interior of the two-family house, is good scenery calling for something better in the way of a play. Will Geer plays with commendable restraint as the father who backs his daughter in her pursuit of good will, but Ernestine Barrier, in the role of the hysterical and broadly drawn Mrs. Tilden, is shrill, energetic and quite out of control for most of the evening.

"On Whitman Avenue" has a few good moments—such as that when the white boy smashes the neat model of an airplane made by the Negro boy living upstairs—but it is too much of a preachment for good theater. Maxine Wood's writing is naive and obvious. Her play needs compression. It is unbearably repetitious for a great deal of the time.

New York World-Telegram

MAY 9, 1946

Play Hits Out at Race Prejudice

'On Whitman Avenue' Is Tense, Well Acted Treatment of Problem

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"On Whitman Avenue" comes to tighter grips with the postwar racial problem than any play so far presented here. It is intensely personal, small in its consistent focus. Yet it has universality because its drama derives from hearts and minds.

Maxine Wood has written a play with the excitement that exhausts pulses. It grows neatly, moves quickly and fits together. She has the firm painstaking touch of a Hellman.

Yet it is not a perfect play. After a series of conflicts that often make a listener cry out inside for physical violence, the author's self confidence fails her. She is not sure when she has made her point. Her last scene thins out of the tension like smoke rising from a fire.

Delivers a Sock.

There is a feeling of repetition and redundancy in her care to pick up loose ends. And the players are forced into a pitch impossible to sustain.

But the sock has already been delivered. If the play has to ruff on those last few minutes it is just as well for the emotional resources of the audience that it loses some of its impassioned grip.

Basically the story is simple. A strong-minded 19-year-old liberal rents to a homeless Negro family the upper floor of her family's house while her parents are away. The older people cautiously try to see her views, but the community will not have it. The tenants leave, and the girl's family are thrown into utter disunity.

As this situation unfolds logical tensions increase. The young boys of the two families, charmingly and naturally friends at first, become bitter confused enmies.

Weakness Revealed.

The neighbors reveal their weakness as their traditional prejudices are stirred by the most violent objector of their number. A lonely spinster, whose life has been empty but for an invalid mother, finds herself in championing the Negro family through its difficult week of living on Whitman Street.

The veteran who supports his family is made puzzled and anguished, first as he finds the university closed to him and hopeful jobs unavailable, then more so when he must take his family back to a stinking alley where they will share a tiny apartment with others.

Miss Wood has done a clean cut and faithful job of writing believable characters. They waver in their convictions and have pervious temperaments. And each in his way has wit until it deserts all but the spinster in the last scene.

Veteran Has Dignity.

Canada Lee, who also co-produced the play, makes the veteran simple, normal and sincere. He gives the men dignity and honesty, and has the fire for the outbursts when his war battered nerves give way at the neighborhood meeting which he describes as a lynching bee, Northern style.

Will Geer is warm and reasoning as an idealist who realizes his weakness. Unlike his fiery daughter and emotional wife, he knows how far he can buck opinion and when to stop. Geer does a particularly good job of the scenes with his children.

A really sharp and ingenious performance is turned in by Perry Wilson as the daughter in armor. An uninhibited tomboy, her idea of life is simple. "You can't think one way and act another," she says, and drives straight to her point. Miss Wilson gives the role violence and great charm.

Juvenile Role Difficult.

Really better than any of the adults at expressing the distressing confusion of the situation is young Martin Miller. It is a difficult part, boisterous, emotional and varied, and he never lets it drop for an instant.

Hilda Vaughn is outstanding as the spinster. Her humor is wry and her timing is punchy. She does some firm handling of her brief dramatic moments.

Ernestine Barrier starts out with a fair enough idea of the flighty mother of the white family. By the end she has unfortunately let her pitch become hysterical to a point where the speeches which should make some explanation of her violent behavior become meaningless.

But the end of the play dispatches too many people in too many directions, too quickly and without really necessary significance.

PM

MAY 10, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

A Vital Theme Is Ill Handled

PM Reviews

The latest of the season's many racial problem plays, *On Whitman Avenue*, is concerned with a Negro family who move into an aggressively white neighborhood. They desperately need their new home because of the housing shortage; they manage to get it because a liberal college girl rents it to them while her parents are out of town. But neither their own exemplary behavior nor the direness of their plight counts with most of their neighbors, who, partly as intolerant snobs and partly as interested property owners, are hell-bent to oust them.

In the growing uproar, it is the owners of the two-family house into which the Negro family has moved who become the real center of conflict. The father sides with the daughter and a few enlightened neighbors in fighting to keep his tenants on; the mother and the schoolboy son are vociferous about turning them out. In the end the pressure becomes too great; the father gives in, the Negroes are forced to leave, and the protesting young daughter walks out on the mother.

The issue in *On Whitman Avenue* is vital and immediate; the situation is all too believable; the final outcome quite logical. Yet the play is generally unsatisfactory. On the broadest grounds it is unsatisfactory because Miss Wood started with a problem instead of with people, and has merely traced in her story instead of letting the meaning emerge from it. Really effective social drama must first be effective human drama; in the best propagandist sense as well as the artistic sense, we must care about the people as people, not just as symbols and types.

But *On Whitman Avenue* also goes sledding because the problem, important as it is, does not in the dramatic sense fill the play. For something like half the evening, Miss Wood succeeds in holding your interest while she unfolds her situation, introduces her characters, indicates the growing tension, brings matters to a head at a fairly stormy neighborhood meeting. But since hers is a problem that can only be stated, that cannot be solved, the play admits of no fundamental progression, and thereafter it just treads water. Miss Wood, to her credit, refuses to bolster things up with large-sized melodrama, but she can only bog them down in tiresomely repetitious incident—some of which, for that matter, has a pretty melodramatic air.

Beyond that, I'm afraid the play falls short in skill as well as in scheme. There are occasional lively scenes, and two or three characters that have a certain outline and stage value. But for the most part Miss Wood has indulged in cliches of speech and characterization alike, has made mouthpieces and special pleaders of too many of her people, has sentimentalized scenes that could more than stand on their realistic merits.

The production also adds little. Miss Jones has provided shaky direction, and so good an actor as Canada Lee is guilty of bad overacting. Most of the others just struggle—a few of them rather violently.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

Journal American

MAY 9, 1946

'Whitman Avenue' Presented at Cort

By ROBERT GARLAND

If last night's play proves anything new—and I'm not so sure it does!—it proves that Canada Lee is more than ever to be reckoned with as a fine American actor. Not before in an honorable career have his on-stage talents been seen to more admirable advantage than in Maxine Wood's "On Whitman Avenue" which, in association with Mark Marvin and George McLain, he himself has brought to Broadway.

It takes neither me nor a program in 48th Street to inform you that Canada Lee has earned his position as one of our foremost Negro players by such outstanding performances as Bigger Thomas in "Native Son," Blacksnake in "Stevedore," Henri Christophe in "Haiti," Johnson in "South Pacific" and Danny in "Anna Lucasta," a minor role that was scarcely great enough for him to wear. These remain memorable!

If, in Cheryl Crawford's revival of "The Tempest," this fine American actor looked like nothing so much as a bush, walking, the fault was the makeup man's, not Mr. Lee's. The makeup man's and William Shakespeare's for composing a part calling for grunts rather than histrionics. But now, as David Bennett of Whitman Avenue, Canada Lee is out of camouflage, back in civies and acting like an angel.

An avenging angel, quiet with a dark and dangerous anger!

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Good Intentions

So far, so good. But, here and now, it is in his admirers—among whom I am proud to be!—to wish that Canada Lee could select his play as assuredly as he can act it. As the outstanding player of "On Whitman Avenue," he is without error. As the outstanding producer of "On Whitman Avenue," he is something else again. For his hand-picked dramatist fails to live up to his productional good intentions.

In "On Whitman Avenue," Maxine Wood sets out to prove that, humanly speaking, white is white, black is black and never the twain shall meet on terms of equality in a suburban development, hard by a biggish city in our American Middle West. It is an unhappy truism of which nonplaywrights have been aware for a long, long time. Miss Wood seems to have heard of it but yesterday. Or the day before.

What is even more deplorable, Miss Wood's characters in Miss Wood's "On Whitman Avenue" seem to have heard of it not at all. The Bennetts, who are black and nice, move in on the Tildens, who are white and nasty. Both the Bennetts and the Tildens are undramatically upset when the made-to-order citizens of the immediate neighborhood take exception to a Negro family living like outcasts in their Caucastic midst.

It's the playwright, I feel, who makes them do it.

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Poor Fulfillment

Like Arnaud d'Usseau and James Gow in "Deep Are the Roots;" Lillian Smith in "Strange Fruit"; Robert Ardrey in "Jeb"; Len Zinberg and Abram Hill in "Walk Hard"; Edwin Bronner in "A Young American" and all the remembered, half-remembered and forgotten others, Maxine Wood in "On Whitman Avenue" sets out to prove a point which needs no proving, a point upon which all clear thinking men and women are ardently agreed.

The trouble at the Cort is that the author of "On Whitman Avenue" — and the producers, I presume—believes that interracial prejudice, intolerance and suspicion can be done away with by merely bringing a couple of isolated families together. And would be done away with if only the wayward whites and the benevolent blacks would stop being stubborn and think as democratically as they do.

To make her point convincing, Maxine Wood paints her blacks all white, her whites all black and stacks her cards exactly as she wants them. Apart from Will Geer, Abbie Mitchell and the flawless Mr. Lee, her players are equally contrived and unbelievable. So contrived, so unbelievable are they that the would-be helpful direction of Margo Jones and the should-be helpful setting of Donald Oenslager are for the most part wasted.

"On Whitman Avenue" falls far short of its fine intentions. But not Canada Lee as actor.

"Henry IV. Part I."

The Old Vic is repertory theatre, space permits us to reproduce only four newspaper reviews of each of their four presentations.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

MAY 7, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Glowing and Vibrant

THE Old Vic company has started its repertory season at the Century Theater with a brilliant and balanced revival of Henry IV, Part I. Our distinguished visitors from London could scarcely have chosen a better introduction here for their craftsmanship. The production of the Shakespeare chronicle is conventional in form and design. The cuts are few; the costumes are traditional and the scenes have a classic continuity. No player is placed in special focus, although Ralph Richardson, by the very nature of the play, dominates the action as Falstaff. What makes the work tremendously exciting is the spectacle of a true repertory company, working with artistry and imagination to achieve a glowing and vibrant piece of theater.

No better test of the group's consummate harmony could be had than in the superb juxtaposition of martial alarums, as Henry's recalcitrant nobles gang up on him, and the scenes of lusty comedy in which Falstaff struts his guts across the stage. The former are no mere breathing spells for the ribald eloquence of the latter. With Laurence Olivier giving a choloric and captivating performance of Henry (Hotspur) Parcy and Nicholas Hannen making Henry IV a singularly despotic monarch, there is ringing drama even in the somewhat tinny battle scenes. If Richardson is to be most gratefully remembered for his superb portrait of the man who lived well and loved good company, it is not by any means a purely personal triumph.

As was the case with the Maurice Evans-Margaret Webster rendition of Henry IV Part I some seasons ago, it is true that Falstaff embodies the rich core of this Shakespeare salute to Bolingbroke. In the hands of Richardson, he becomes a particularly wonderful rascal. The great actor misses no inflection of the part, wiggling out of discomfiture when he has been set upon by Prince Hal in a mammoth practical joke in the highway robbery scene, or voicing his amoral and engaging philosophy of life. He swaggers and staggers with magnificent aplomb and bids for no mawkish sympathy, even in his more ignoble aspects. Richardson alone is worth seeing the Old Vic company for, but it is far more generous with its talents.

Olivier, while hurrying some speeches and making too much of Hotspur's slight stutter, electrifies the martial scenes on every occasion. His baiting of Glendower is vastly effective and his scenes with his wife, played beautifully by Margaret Leighton, are tenderly moving. Michael Warre is fine as the Henry who is to become fifth in the line. Diana Maddox makes Welsh peculiarly eloquent as Glendower's daughter and George Relph is a sinister Earl of Worcester. The company will appear many times again, which will permit space for more individual plaudits. Suffice it to say that it collaborates on every scene exquisitely. John Burrell's staging is first-rate and the Hernbert Menges music and Roger Purse's costumes highlight every turn of a memorable stage production.

'HENRY IV,' PART I.

Play by William Shakespeare; staged by John Burrell; music by Herbert Menges; costumes by Roger Furse; scenery by Gower Parks; lighting by John Sullivan; fights arranged by Peter Copley; orchestra under the direction of Herbert Menges; played by the Old Vic Company and presented by Theatre Incorporated at the Century Theater Monday evening, May 6, 1946. The cast:

King Henry IV.....Nicholas Hannen
Henry, Prince of Wales.....Michael Warre
John of Lancaster.....Robin Lloyd
Earl of Westmoreland.....Peter Copley
Earl of Warwick.....Kenneth Edwards
Sir Walter Blunt.....Cecil Winter
Earl of Worcester.....George Relph
Earl of Northumberland.....Miles Malleson
Henry Percy (Hotspur).....Laurence Olivier
Lord Mortimer, Earl of March.....David Kentish
Owen Glendower.....Harry Andrews
Archibald, Earl of Douglas.....William Monk
Sir Richard Vernon.....Frank Duncan
Sir John Falstaff.....Ralph Richardson
Bardolph.....Michael Raghan
Poins.....Sidney Tafler
Peto.....George Ross
Mistress Quickly.....Elsa Burrill
Lady Percy.....Margaret Leighton
Lady Mortimer.....Diana Maddox
Servant to Hotspur.....Joseph James
A Traveler.....Frank Duncan
Another Traveler.....William Squire
Francis, a Windrawer.....John Carley
Vintner of the Boar's Head.....Kenneth Edwards
Sheriff.....William Monk

Lords, Attendants and Soldiers: Lawrence Carr, George Cooper, Frank Duncan, John Carley, Carl James, Joseph James John Reilly and Sandy Roe.

PM

MAY 8, 1946

—Kronenberger—

Old Vic Has Fine Start

PM Reviews

Monday night had promised to be a notable occasion in the theater, and on the whole it was. Offering the first part of *Henry IV*, the Old Vic brought to Broadway a quality of Shakespearean excitement that it seldom experiences. It made us alike aware of how much vitality still lurks in the most famous of the chronicle plays, and of how much greatness. I have seen (counting the portions that Orson Welles included in *Five Kings*) three American productions of *Henry IV*, Part I. None of them, whatever their merits, comparably managed to catch the spirit of the play, or suggest the size, as the Old Vic, whatever its faults, did on Monday night.

The special virtues of the Old Vic's production are not precisely those you might expect. You might conceive, for example, of Shakespeare's own countrymen *speaking* his lines magnificently. Actually, neither the Old Vic's diction nor its rendering of verse is exceptional. Again, you might imagine that this repertory production would be a model of teamwork: actually, though the teamwork is smooth, it is partly defeated by a good deal of no more than adequate performing. Finally, though this *Henry IV* shows a natural feeling for tradition, it fails in many particulars to have any superlative quality of style. Even the sets have no distinction of that kind.

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What this *Henry* does have, once it gets going, is a fine robust sense of theater that never slips into mere theatricality; and an excellent sense of balance about the two sides of the play, which Shakespeare alternated with deliberate purpose and decided effect. Of the four Falstaffs I have seen, the current one is much the richest and most alive; but he bestrides the play without muffling or flattening out the turbulent page of history that it unrolls.

For this sense of robustness and of balance alike, we must almost entirely thank the performances of Ralph Richardson as Falstaff and of Laurence Olivier as Hotspur. It is their individual acting that gives this *Henry* all its real fire and force, its blaze of color and gaiety. This is not surprising, since the one role is very great and the other can be made very grand. Moreover, no two roles offer a more purposeful, or more stinging, contrast. Here are chivalric honor plumed and worldly rascality rampant; the born hero slain by his intrepidity and the born knave saved by his cunning. They are the two moral poles of the play; yet they are alike in this, that both are superbly charged with personality.

Mr. Olivier plays the rebel as the impetuous hothead he was, but without the rant and stridency that too many Hotspurs bring to the part. He has, instead, real dash; a gay high hand with his wife as with the world; impatience of mind as well as of blood; a primitive sarcastic humor. He does not play "nobly;" he plays dynamically. The performance, I think, lacks modulation; but it is magnetic and human.

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Mr. Richardson's Falstaff has the spaciousness of character as well as the wit. Gallons of ink have been spent on interpreting the role, and on defending a man whose gaiety and charm are, surely, his own supreme defense. Mr. Richardson simply follows the text. Over the protests of all the Morganns and Bradleys, his Falstaff is patently a physical coward; but, along with that, it is the mightiest and merriest of liars, wenchers, swillers and rogues. Yet Falstaff is no unconscious butt—he is rather, to my mind, a most obliging showman, a showman to his fingertips who, time and again, acts and overacts his part precisely as Hal and the others wish him to. He lives, after all, by his wit as well as his wits. For the rest, in both tastes and morals, he is an utter worldling.

Mr. Richardson has infused something of all this, along with immense vitality, into the part; and has raised the greatest of the tavern scenes to that pitch of gaiety which is close to tears. He is again remarkably good in the soliloquy on Honor. Beyond his acting, his voice can be wonderfully right and varied. It is a distinguished performance.

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One other fine performance the play demands, and this it does not get. Michael Warre is not adequate as Hal. The role, after all, is the pivotal one of the play and—in the perspective of the chronicles as a whole—the most important. The growth of the Prince in character, from a roistering to a royal personage, demands not only a range but a quality of acting that Mr. Warre simply has not got. The smaller roles vary: Nicholas Hannen's King Henry is good enough, and George Relph's Worcester and Harry Andrews' Owen Glendower are rather better. Margaret Leighton makes a pleasing Lady Percy; but one wishes that Sybil Thorndike had come along with the troupe to play Mistress Quickly.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

The Sun

MAY 7, 1946

Old Vic Players, Opening at Century, Give Distinguished Production of 'Henry IV.'

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The Old Vic players, overcoming an unmerciful advance build-up, got off to a brilliant start last evening at the Century. They began their play and their New York season at 8:15 o'clock and gave the first audience a distinguished production of Shakespeare's "Henry IV," part one.

"Henry IV," long neglected in the American theater and last done by Maurice Evans and Margaret Webster in 1939, is a panoramic play mingling comedy with tragedy. It combines the broad ribaldry of the tavern scenes with the strong drama brought on by the forces of the valiant Hotspur in their rebellion against the King. As played by the company that is at the Century for a six weeks' stay, "Henry IV" comes forth as a vivid and impressive play, providing an evening in the theater that is unforgettable.

These visitors from London can act! Shakespeare's historical chronicle becomes startlingly alive under their treatment. The company is generally excellent, and in Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson the Old Vic offers two of the finest players of our time.

Olivier has the role of Henry Percy, known as Hotspur, who joins Mortimer and the Earl of Douglas and the Welsh chieftain, Owen Glendower, in a mighty effort to overthrow the King and in a cause that comes to an inglorious end on the battlefield of Shrewsbury. Olivier is a fluent and flexible actor. He makes Hotspur an impassioned, fiery and volatile figure. His is a performance that begins slowly and grows gradually in strength and in scope.

Ralph Richardson is the roistering Sir John Falstaff, and he frequently takes possession of the play. Certainly he does in his Boar's Head tavern scenes and in his soliloquy on the plain at Shrewsbury. Knave, braggart and liar, Sir John tells his biggest in claiming to have slain Hotspur in battle. Richardson's Falstaff is a great-bellied rogue—slow of foot, merry of eye, snow-white of hair, witty and wise, droll and drunken, given to slanderous utterance but a gentleman for all his roaring. It is a magnificent portrayal.

The playing of Olivier and Richardson provide the performances of the evening, but there are other players who come through impressively. Nicholas Hannen is entirely convincing as the harassed king. Michael Warre brings spirit and variety to the role of the madcap Prince Henry, heir to the throne, who goes his way unheedingly until he is finally jolted into a sense of the responsibilities of his station by a plea from his troubled father. Margaret Leighton reads the lines of Lady Percy with clarity and feeling.

There are excellent performances from George Relph as the sententious Earl of Worcester, Miles Malleson as Northumberland and Michael Raghan as Bardolph. The production has been nicely staged by John Burrell. The costuming and lighting are good and appropriate music has been contributed by Herbert Menges.

"Henry IV," part one, sets the Old Vic company on its way. The first production has vibrancy and vitality and Olivier and Richardson, notwithstanding all the ballyhoo, don't let you down. Theater Incorporated may well take pride in its achievement in bringing so fine a company to New York.

Tonight: "Henry IV," part two.

Journal American

MAY 8, 1946

'Henry IV: Part I' Opens At Century Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

After a build-up not unworthy of a revival of the Creation with the original cast, the Old Vic Theatre Co. from London—without the distinguished leading lady known as Sybil Thorndike—opened its initial transoceanic season last night at the Century. The play was William Shakespeare's "Henry IV: Part I," which has not been given hereabouts since, seven years ago, Maurice Evans and Mady Christians tested their talents on its verbiage under the tearless Shakespearian direction of Margaret Webster.

Now, beneath the guiding hand of John Burrell, with music by Herbert Menges, costumes by Roger Furse, backgrounds by Gower Parks, lighting by John Sullivan and fights by Peter Copley, this "Henry IV: Part I" emerges as a neither very, very good nor very, very bad importation of one of the master's neither very, very good nor very, very bad histories in dialogue. Even when you understand what the visitors are saying—which is not always—it is no flawless theatrical thing to make America ashamed.

Not to be uncousinly, the America that need not be ashamed did better than the English do by "Henry IV: Part I" as long ago as 1926. At the Knickerbocker Theatre, Otis Skinner was in the Ralph Richardson role, Philip Merivale was in the Laurence Olivier role and William Courtleigh, Basil Sydney, Thomas Chalmers, Gilbert Emery, John Cumberland, J. M. Kerrigan, James T. Powers, Peggy Wood, Blanche Ring, Edith Barrett and Betty Lawford were supporting players. John Drew spoke a prologue.

We, too, have had our high and handsome Henries!

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Good and Gala

Last night, up near Central Park, an overflowing and distinguished congregation got a good show for its dollars. These dollars were all of twelve, as printed on the tickets. Sidewalks outside the Century were jammed with autograph hunters in search of celebrities, celebrities avoiding autograph hunters while well groomed, well fed and frequently well bred playgoers were trying to squeeze into the auditorium. And, of course, drama critics in dinner jackets on their way to work.

It was not only a good show. It was good and gala! Within the theatre, which used to be the Jolson, a fine and friendly gathering settled back to welcome the players from overseas. No more than fifteen minutes behind schedule, a hidden, not to say hesitant, orchestra broke into "God Save the King," which, after a decent interval, became "The Star Spangled Banner." The house lights went down, the footlights went up and the curtains parted on Mr. Parks' not so merry England.

Then and there Nicholas Hannen got a great big hand as the Henry of the title. And, in the order of their naming, Laurence Olivier got a great big hand as the Henry Percy, better known as Hotspur, and Ralph Richardson got a great big hand as the Sir John, better known as Falstaff. Later on, Ena Burrill got a great big hand as the Mistress Quickly who, in the Old Vic's mother-theatre, was entrusted to the absent Sybil Thorndike. It was great big hands across the sea, believe me.

Hearty hands, both warm and welcoming.

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Actors Take Over

Then—and if this is a minority report, it is also a true one—something began to happen. Slowly, but surely, a feeling of disappointment began to take possession of the audience. What might have been an integrated projection of a second-string history play by William Shakespeare began to be a disintegrated vehicle for the showy actorial portraiture of Laurence Olivier as Hotspur and Ralph Richardson as Falstaff. Slowly, but surely, these took over, dividing the work between them.

It was a good show, all right. In technicolor! It was two good shows for the pretty price of one. But, as the evening waned, the serio-comic history of Henry IV became the serio-comic portrait of Henry Percy on the one hand and the serio-comic portrait of Sir John on the other. It was a long time at the Century before the serio-comic incidents managed to pull themselves together. And Mr. Olivier's and Mr. Richardson's surrounding players were, on the whole, of no great assistance.

Among these surrounding players, mention may be made of Margaret Leighton as Lady Percy, George Relph as the Earl of Worcester, Nicholas Hannen as King Henry and Ena Burrill as Mistress Quickly. But it was Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson who made "Henry IV: Part I," the Century Theatre and the Old Vic's first American audience their own. The rest—acting, direction, scenery, costumes—was run-of-the-repertory-theatre Shakespeare, recited none too audibly.

Tonight, Old Vic and King Henry carry on.

"Henry IV. Part II."

DAILY NEWS

MAY 8, 1946

Hilarity Reigns in Second Part Of Old Vic's 'Henry the Fourth'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Having had the happy fortune to see the Old Vic Theatre Company last evening in "Henry IV, Part II," I cannot understand why this play has not been produced here in almost 80 years, while Part I has been presented with reasonable frequency. For this second half of William Shakespeare's history of the fourth Henry is a glowing, vigorous work whose drama is relieved by superbly lusty, delightfully lewd comedy.

The reason for these long years of neglect may be, of course, that there haven't been any players around to present the work properly. But now there are, and appreciation of the Old Vic company increases in the same measure as does one's familiarity with them.

Ralph Richardson is, naturally, again Falstaff—as great a rogue as ever, but one destined for a pathetic comedown in the final scene. Laurence Olivier, who plays the young, impetuous Hotspur in Part I and dies in battle, now appears as Shallow, an ancient, bibulous and frail justice of the peace. It is an admirable transformation, and it gives Messrs. Olivier and Richardson opportunity for some memorably funny scenes.

A Wonderful Bawd.

With the unfolding of Part II, one begins to sense the resources of these visitors from London. There appears, as Doll Tearsheet, an utterly remarkable young woman named Joyce Redman. Doll Tearsheet is an inebriated bawd to be found in Falstaff's hangout, the Boar's Head Tavern — and when Miss Redman essays to play an inebriated bawd the role stays played. She is that very rare creature among actresses, a superb low comedienne, and her amorous tussles with Sir John are passages of utter and surprising frankness. Frank and surprising, too, is her gown, so precariously and yet so firmly perched upon a bosom which should inspire Howard Hughes to the deep study of Shakespeare and Miss Redman.

This young woman's resources are, shall we say, natural; but there are many other resources in the Old Vic roster. Nicholas Hannen is a monarch of great stature as Henry IV, and his deathbed scene is a fine one. Michael Warre, as the Prince of Wales, increases in stature, too, as he turns from the questionable comradeship of Falstaff and Poins to the sobering affairs of a kingdom.

All Roles Well Filled.

Cecil Winter appears authoritatively as the Chief Justice, and George Relph, who is an earl in Part I, now becomes the brawling and slightly daft Pistol. Ena Burrill, as Mistress Quickly, is increasingly amusing, and Miles Malleson switches to another impersonation and, as Justice Silence, is great help to the hilarity engendered by Olivier and Richardson.

And, when Shakespeare calls for people named Fang, Snare, Mouldy, Wart, Shadow, Feeble and Bullcalf, the resourceful Old Vic outfit provides people who look like their names.

"HENRY IV: PART II," by William Shakespeare; presented at the Century Theatre by the Old Vic Company of London. Staged by John Burrell. Music by Herbert Menges. Costumes by Roger Furse. Lighting by John Sullivan. Scenery by Gower Parks.

THE CAST

Rumour, The Prologue	Nicolette Bernard
King Henry IV	Nicholas Hannen
Henry, Prince of Wales (Afterwards) King Henry V	Michael Warre
Prince John of Lancaster	Robin Lloyd
Thomas, Duke of Clarence	George Rose
Prince Humphrey of Gloucester	John Garley
Earl of Warwick	Kenneth Edwards
Earl of Westmoreland	Peter Copley
The Lord Chief Justice	Cecil Winter
His Servant	Max Brent
Fang	Frank Duncan
Snare	Joseph James
Gower	Kenneth Edwards
Earl of Northumberland	Miles Malleson
Lady Northumberland	Bryony Chapman
Lady Percy, Widow of Henry Hotspur	Margaret Leighton
Travers	Robin Lloyd
Morton	Peter Copley
Scroop, Archbishop of York	Harry Andrews
Lord Mowbray	William Squire
Lord Hastings	David Kentish
Lord Bardolph	George Rose
Sir John Colevile	Sidney Tafler
Sir John Falstaff	Ralph Richardson
His Page	Brian Parker
Mistress Quickly	Ena Burrill
Bardolph	Michael Bayliss
Poins	Sidney Tafler
Pete	George Rose
Doll Tearsheet	Joyce Redman
Pistol	George Relph
Francis, a Winedrawer	John Garley
Another Winedrawer	Robin Lloyd
Justice Shallow	Laurence Olivier
Justice Silence	Miles Malleson
Davy, Servant to Shallow	William Medlin
Mouldy	George Rose
Wart	John Garley
Shadow	Frank Duncan
Feeble	David Kentish
Bullcalf	Joseph James

Lords, Attendants, Soldiers, Citizens, Elephants: Barrie, Bryony Chapman, Julie Harris, Dee Sparks, Jane Wenham, Lawrence Carr, Rudolph Cavell, George Cowser, Will Davis, Frank Duncan, Carl James, Elmer Lohr, Bernard Pollack, John Reilly, Paul Riley, Sandy Rae, William Squire, Al Snyder, Alvin Sullum, Richard Wendley.

Part I is just a warmup for Part II. Maybe Shakespeare wrote it that way.

New York Post

MAY 8, 1946

'Henry IV,' Part II, Offers Good Acting by the Old Vic

By Vernon Rice

Continuing on its impressive way, London's Old Vic Company presented Part II of "Henry IV" last night at the Century where it has set up shop under the sponsorship of Theatre Incorporated for a six-week period.

There is much that is moving and much that is uproariously funny in this second part and all of it is superbly played by a cast, which has received luminous and sensitive direction from John Burrell.

Understandable first-night jitters seemed to have been missing from the cast last evening and many of the glamourous ones were missing from the audience, so those on the stage settled down and gave a worthy performance and those in the audience settled down and saw it.

This portion of Shakespeare's Henry story brings to a final finish all the opposing factions within the kingdom, sees the death of the king with his earnest desire to lead the crusade to the Holy Land unfulfilled, and finds the new king, Henry V, taking over his father's tasks with dignity and sobriety.

More of Henry IV

Shakespeare gives more of Henry IV in this play, and here he shows the ruler as a man with a prodigious spirit and great courage, a man with a deep love for his country and his family.

As played by Nicholas Hannen, particularly the scene with his sons at the time he collapses upon receiving word that all opposition has ended, and the one he plays alone with Prince Hal as he lies on his death bed, the beauty of the writing comes into its own.

Michael Warre, though still not all that Prince Hal should be, warmed to the occasion, and gave a much better performance than he did Monday night.

Margaret Webster wrote in her "Shakespeare Without Tears" that actually these two plays should be entitled "Falstaff," Parts I and II. She is not far wrong. The Bard did not squander this wonderfully comic character all in the first portion, but divided his scenes in about equal proportions between the two plays. Consequently, there is a goodly amount of Falstaff in the two sections.

There is probably not a more hilarious scene in all of Shakespeare than the Boar Head Tavern scene which Falstaff has with Doll Tearsheet, especially in the hands of Ralph Richardson's Falstaff, about which there is nothing left to be said, and those of Joyce Redman as Doll. Nor one more vigorously bawdy.

Miss Redman's Doll is the very essense of an overworked shady lady and about ten times as funny. She's lusty, she's lewd, she's unkempt, and above all she's wildly ludicrous.

If Falstaff crushes the funnybone, he also touches the heart. Richardson's playing of the final scene, in which he is rejected and banished by the new king, points up that though the character may be a comic foil, he is also a man.

Shakespeare brings into this play a comedy team, Justices Shallow and Silence, friends of Falstaff. Laurence Oliver follows up his skillful characterization of Hotspur of the previous night with an equally skillful one of Shallow. Here he is old and he is tiresome, the kind of old man who loves to repeat word upon word, phrase upon phrase, so enamoured is he of his own talk. versatility, thy name is Olivier.

Miles Malleson, plays the Silent Sam of the team, Silence, with adroitness and amusing taciturnity.

Now that the furor caused by the arrival of the Old Vic has passed, perhaps true theatre-lovers can settle down and enjoy the performances, as exemplified by last night's "Henry IV," Part II, that this company is capable of giving.